



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Newcastle Fostering Service

**Social Services
4-8 Clarence Walk
Shieldfield
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne & Wear
NE2 1AL**

Lead Inspector
Stephen Smith

Key Announced Inspection
12th June 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
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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

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Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Paul Chadwick
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 31st October 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Newcastle fostering service is based at the Shieldfield Centre in Newcastle upon Tyne. The service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide placements to children and young people with a wide range of needs, including long term foster care and short-term placements. The service also provides foster carers for young people with disabilities within a shared care scheme and supports a growing number of family and friends foster carers. At the time of the inspection the service was supporting approximately 200 foster carers with around 290 children in placements. The service has a staff team comprising social workers responsible for assessing new foster carers and those who supervise carers once they are approved and administrative staff. The manager is supported by a deputy manager.

SUMMARY

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

The inspectors would like to thank all the children, carers, staff and children's social workers consulted about Newcastle Social Services Fostering Service for their welcome and the way they helped the inspectors do their job and find out what the fostering service is like. All people the inspectors talked to were very helpful and many people spent time filling in questionnaires and sending them to the inspectors before the visit to the service. Information and evidence in this report comes from questionnaires sent to foster carers, fostered children and placing social workers, written information supplied by the manager and the things the inspectors saw and the people they spoke to when they visited. Questionnaires were returned from 26 foster children and 38 foster carers. Social workers sent back survey forms about more than 80 fostered children. Many social workers had filled in several survey forms because they had a number of children placed with different foster carers. The inspectors want to say a special thank you to these social workers who made the time to fill in and send these forms to us; the information was very valuable. All this information was used when this report was written.

A team of three inspectors carried out the inspection, which was done alongside an inspection of Newcastle's adoption service and an inspection of its arrangements for private fostering. The reader may wish to read both these reports as well. Altogether, 11 inspector days were spent with the fostering team and 3 days were spent reading questionnaires and sorting out the information they had in them. During the inspection the team gathered information by:

- Talking individually with children, carers and fostering staff;
- Visiting foster carers homes;
- Group discussion with carers;
- Interview with the fostering manager;
- Interviews with children's social workers, the Head of Service and the Placements Manager;
- Reading children's, carers and staff files;
- Reading records;
- Studying the questionnaires sent back to us;
- Watching the fostering panel and reading records of its meetings.

There are a lot of things that the fostering service does well including the way it checks out new foster carers and the way it supervises and reviews carers. Children said good things about their foster carers and the help that they get. They said things like:

- " I am well cared for because if anything happens to me they are always there for me and it's the safest place to live and they love me to bits and treat me like their own daughter and will never let anything happen to me."

- "My placement is fantastic and my carer is a fantastic person to be around. She has helped me to raise my daughter and has taught me a lot."
- "I am very happy where I live now. I am staying with my foster parents for ever and they will help me in the future."
- "The family I live with are the best in the world."
- "It's very good in care and I make lots of friends. I also am going on holiday and I know I'm safe and I am loved."

A lot of foster carers and social workers said good things about how the fostering service helps children but a lot said that they don't think things are very good. Inspectors listened to everything people said and found some things in the inspection that are very good. Inspectors also found, however, that there are some big problems that affect children's social services in Newcastle. These problems are written down in the "What they could do better" section below. These need to be sorted out so that all children get good help from the fostering service.

What the service does well:

Newcastle children's social services has good links with health services and these links can help children to be more healthy. The local authority is good at making sure that children have regular medical checks to make sure they are healthy or to find out any problems.

Children who were spoken to and all the children who sent back survey forms said that they are well cared for in their foster home and said very good things about their foster carers.

The local authority does some good work in finding out ways of helping children and their families to get support but stay together. The 'shared care' and 'family and friends' foster carers the inspectors met and read about had helped children to stay with their families when they might have had to have moved to live with someone else.

The service is also usually good at working to help children to get a good education and it is good at finding out what children think about the care they receive and what they want out of their lives.

The fostering service provides good information and help for foster carers from different ethnic backgrounds and for those carers who are looking after children from a different culture or with special needs.

The fostering service is good at working with people who want to foster to make sure that they are the right sort of people. New foster carers get checked out very carefully and get good training before they can foster. New foster carers cannot foster until a group of experts called a panel make a

recommendation that they are the right sort of people and have the skills they need to look after children properly. This panel is very careful, gets a lot of information and thinks very hard about people before it recommends that they can foster. This is good for children as it helps keep them safe and have a good life.

The service is also good at making sure that the staff members that come to work for it are well checked out to make sure they are the right sort of people to work with children and have got the right qualifications and experience to do their jobs properly.

The manager of the fostering service does a good job of running the service. He has made changes that have made things better and has plans to keep on making things better. The manager knows the things that are happening to children in foster carer and makes sure that the right things happen if any problems have happened.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the fostering service has done a lot of things that the last inspection said it needed to do.

The arrangements for assessing and approving 'family and friends' foster carers have got better. The service has found a good way of making sure that it keeps to the rules when it does these assessments but also makes sure that people who are going to foster children who are related to them get properly checked out and get all the training and support they need to do the job. This area is important because it is a good thing, where it can be done, for children to be able to stay within their bigger family.

This inspection found that children's social workers are now visiting children in foster placements as often as it says in the local authority's policy. This is a good thing because it helps make sure that children are being cared for properly and can tell social workers what they think about their care.

The service is also better at making sure that foster carers get all the paperwork they need about the children placed with them. Children's files looked at had all the proper papers in them.

The fostering service now has a duty worker service during office hours like it says in its statement of purpose. This means that people who telephone the fostering service will always get someone they can speak to for advice or support.

Foster carers have been getting training in basic first aid which helps them look after children, the service needs to keep on giving this training so the other foster carers get it as well.

The service has got better at making sure that staff sometimes visit foster carers' homes without telling them they are going to go and staff know what they have to do at these visits. This is important as it is another way of checking up that children are getting looked after properly.

The fostering service has done other things as well.

It has started to use a new way of planning and writing down foster carers' supervision to make sure that the right checks are done and that the right things are talked about. The new way makes sure that children's care is talked about as well as any problems or training and help needed.

One of the biggest things the fostering service has done is to get more staff. It has then worked out the things that staff need to do and the time this takes. This work means that supervising social workers now have to help less foster carers so have more time to work with each one. They will also be able to do more foster carers' training, run support events for foster carers and work better with the children's social worker teams.

What they could do better:

To make the service better for all children there are some things that the fostering service has to do. There are, also, some important things that have to be done by Newcastle social services as a whole. These things need to be done so that all children are helped to get the good outcomes that some children get.

The local authority needs to make sure it has enough children's social workers and that they stay in their jobs for a long time. This will make sure that all staff know how they have to work together, in the same way, to give good information and support given to foster carers and children.

The local authority needs to make sure there are less emergency placements of children with foster carers and more placements that are planned. This is important because it will allow children to move, in a planned way, to carers who know enough about them and are properly suited to the needs of the child.

The local authority also needs to find more foster carers and work out when and why it should use foster placements from independent fostering agencies. It needs to do this so that the money it has got to spend on fostering is used well to allow a better choice of suitable foster carers so that children and carers can be matched better.

The local authority needs to make sure that all foster carers get to know as much as possible about a child when the placement is made. This is important so that carers can meet children's needs better and make sure they are safe.

Social workers need to fill in all the forms about children properly so there is enough up-to-date information about the child to give to foster carers.

Newcastle Social Services needs to work out how the fostering work done by the 'shared care' service can be managed and supervised by the fostering team to make sure they work in the same way.

The social services department also needs to make sure that the assessments of all 'family and friends' foster carers start as soon as the child goes to live with relatives to make sure that they are safe and the fostering service keeps to government rules.

There are some parts of foster carers training that need to get better. All foster carers need to have regular child protection and safe caring training and all need to have training in how to deal with difficult behaviour properly. The fostering service should make sure that all foster carers do regular training and it needs to be better at writing down what training foster carers have done so it knows exactly who has done what training.

What social workers think about foster carers and, where it is possible, what the foster child thinks about the carers must be written down and thought about when foster carers have their reviews. Foster carer's reviews should not happen unless the social worker doing the review report has visited the foster carer's home.

The fostering service should work out and start a system for regularly finding out what children think about how the fostering service is run and working out what they need to do about their views.

The fostering service needs to talk with some foster carers to sort out the different thoughts they have about the allowances they get for fostering and for using their cars. This is important because some carers said that children are missing out on activities and having contact with families affected because allowances are not high enough to pay for activities. The service needs to make sure that this does not happen.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. The service is able to provide good support for children's health and achieve good outcomes but the lack of staffing stability in the children's teams and a high level of emergency placements means these outcomes are not being consistently achieved.

EVIDENCE:

A range of people spoken to during the inspection told inspectors of good links developed by children's social services with health services and evidence was available to show situations where these links had benefited fostered children. Evidence provided by the fostering service showed that the percentage of fostered children with up-to-date annual Looked After Children (LAC) medicals is high and social workers spoken to described incentives used to encourage children to undergo these medical checks. Information in some LAC documentation examined about children's health needs was not as detailed as it should have been, for example the medical and hospital information sections of two of the six Essential information Records (EIR) examined were not completed, so this information was not accessible to people working with the child.

The fostering service's panel includes the authority's LAC Nurse and this helps panel consider children's health issues when matching arrangements are considered.

The service has been placing emphasis on ensuring that foster carers receive training in first aid. A significant number of carers completed this training in 2005 with a similar number planning to complete it in 2006.

Young people visited in their foster placements by inspectors were registered with doctors and dentists and foster carers provided evidence that young people's medical and health needs were being met. One carer visited was working closely with the school nurse to support a fostered child's mother to meet the young person's health needs.

In their survey responses 82% of young people said their health needs are always met with 9% saying their needs are usually met. This shows a high level of children's satisfaction and children's comments supported these figures. "I get told so I stay healthy", "They encourage me to eat fruit and veg and (carer) plays lots of football with me and takes me on walks", "I get told to eat more healthy and to stick to the sport I chose" and "They sort checks on my general health." Social workers who completed questionnaires were generally very positive about how well children's health is being promoted, 89% said excellent or good with the remaining respondents considering health to be adequately promoted.

Foster carers' views of how well the fostering service supports them to promote children's health varied. 24% of respondents thought the service's help with children's health is excellent, 27% said it is good. 38% of respondents, however, considered arrangements to be adequate and 11% said they are poor. Positive comments from carers included "Healthy lifestyles are very much encouraged through activity days and health checks of children", "I have had support from my health visitor with healthy eating and lifestyles" and "The children had quite a lot of problems, the social worker got appointments with psychologists and sorted out play therapy very quickly." Others, however, said "Regular medicals etc. pick up any deficiencies but really it's up to us to make sure children have healthy lifestyles" and "They have regular check-ups and we receive brochures about healthy eating and exercise." One carer reported a young person having to wait 13 months for bereavement counselling after the death of her baby.

With regard to how information received about the child at placement affected their abilities to meet children's health needs; 6% of carers said information received was excellent, 39% said it was good and 31% said adequate. Nearly a quarter (24%) of carers, however, said that the amount of information they received about the child prior to the placement was poor. Two carers were very critical in this area. One said, "After seven months into the placement we still have no medical history of the child in care apart from the fact that she had heart surgery. We don't know why or when." The other said, "The information I got with this placement was only a ten minute phone call. I was privy to no files, taking the children to medicals was embarrassing as I could answer very few questions. This information has now been built up over ten months."

The majority of people consulted during the inspection said that a very high proportion of placements are made in 'emergencies' and that this obviously

affects the amount of information received. A significant number of foster carers said that the quality of information about a child received at the time of placement depended on the individual social worker. Many people consulted, both foster carers and social work staff, said there has been an ongoing shortage of social workers in the children's teams and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff that has caused problems in maintaining consistency.

The inspectors recommend that urgent attention is given to stabilising staffing levels within children's social work teams and the development of systems to ensure that quality of practice is not dependent on individual personalities. Additionally, Newcastle should work to reduce the proportion of emergency placements made in order to ensure that more full health information about children is available to carers when placements are made. Action in these areas would help support and replicate the achievement of some of the very positive outcomes for children identified during the inspection.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is poor. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Children are not as safe as they should be because of a high level of emergency placements, a lack of staffing stability and the service's limited ability to match placements properly. The fostering panel provides a rigorous consideration of foster carers' assessments and reviews presented to it and the service is thorough in its vetting of staff and foster carers to ensure they are suitable to work with children.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers visited during the inspection welcomed inspectors and observation of their homes showed that they are comfortable and appropriate for children. Foster carers receive training in health and safety issues as part of their assessment process before their approval and the importance of health and safety arrangements and awareness is set out in the foster carers' handbook.

One foster carer's health and safety assessment done during the assessment had not been updated when, at a later date, the foster carer's review showed that a pond had been added. The foster carer's supervising social worker said she would not normally update the health and safety checklist at the foster

carer's review. As the child placed with this carer has severe learning disabilities it is important that this health and safety checklist is updated as soon as possible. Additionally there was no evidence to show that the carer's car insurance arrangements had been reviewed after an issue was noted during the assessment. The level of detail was not sufficient in some areas of other health and safety checklists examined.

This inspection has shown that the authority's arrangements to match children with foster carers taking into account their specific needs are very variable. Case tracking carried out during the inspection, including visiting foster carers and children, talking to their social workers and reading their files identified some very good outcomes for children. Two situations were examined in which very careful and sensitive work had taken place to maintain and support family relationships in circumstances where outcomes could have been much more disruptive for the young person.

100% of young people said in the questionnaires they returned and those spoken to said they are looked after 'very well' and comments made by children were very positive. Children said, "I am well looked after and I am happy", "I'm safe and loved" and "My placement is fantastic and my carer is a fantastic person to be around. She has helped me to raise my daughter and has taught me a lot." Other comments included, "I am very happy where I live now. I am staying with my foster parents for ever and they will help me in the future" and "The family I live with are the best in the world." One child said she is well cared for "because if anything happens to me they are always there for me and it's the safest place to live and they love me to bits and treat me like their own daughter and will never let anything happen to me." This level of satisfaction from children is very positive.

Foster carers said that information about the child varied. 45% of carers considered the information they received to be good or excellent but 55% said it was adequate or poor (24%).

Foster carers' comments about the quality of information received ranged were varied. Negative comments included, "Information is sometimes excellent, especially if the placement is planned, otherwise it can be abysmal", "The children came as an emergency placement and information has been sketchy at best. Cultural advice has been non-existent" and "The manager at (social work office) said not to tell us one of the children might have hepatitis C, as we did not need to know. It has been found out that the children do not have it but we did not find this out until five months after the placement started." Some carers spoken to said the lack of information can make it difficult to keep children safe. One carer cited an example of fostering a new child with very little information being given to her. She said that after a few days she found out that the child should not be with older children because of her vulnerability, but had not been given this information at the time of the placement so had unknowingly put the child at risk.

Other foster carers' experiences were more positive, "They give information and encourage all carers to follow religions of all children, all races, diets etc.", "All vital information was supplied" and "They have always made sure that I get all the information I need – they don't know everything but they tell me everything they know and I get paperwork very quickly." One carer case tracked told how careful introductions had taken place before the placement started properly.

Foster carers commented that the amount of information received depends on whether a placement was made in an emergency or was planned. They also said, however, that the quality of information received depends on the individual child's social worker or which area office they are based in. Supervising social workers and placing social workers confirmed, in interviews, that the effectiveness of information sharing can depend on personalities and individuals.

Social workers' views about whether the fostering service was able to support the matching process by offering children a suitable choice of placements were mixed. 4% regarded this as excellent, 44% good, 22% adequate with 30% regarding placement choice as poor. Comments made by social workers included, "(Young person) was able to negotiate with staff some of her wishes and needs", "The service is good at matching children and placements", "This has been a good match which has proven very positive for the child" and the service "matches families and children well." The Placements Manager said that placement choice is "pretty good" for children under five years of age but is "very limited for over tens." He said that independent agencies are more successful than the local authority at recruiting carers for adolescents and that a number of carers have moved to independent agencies citing better term and conditions and more frequent support as the reason. The placement manager said that placement choice for older children depends on a high use of high cost independent agencies.

Other comments made by social workers included "This was a wanted, planned placement move for these children although there was not a choice of carers" and "Matches are lacking in the area of ethnicity." One social worker expressed the view that "The service needs to match short term placements better especially children removed re child protection concerns."

Many foster carers, placing social workers and supervising social workers said there are not enough in house foster carers and this causes problems for matching and stability. Comments from social workers included "Lack of choice of placements at crucial times of planning leads to unnecessary moves", "There are not enough foster carers in-house so choice is limited." One social work team manager said "If we can't get a suitable placement then we have to go to an out of town placement and they won't do that if there's anything in-house, so a placement that is not ideal might be forced on us and its really

important that we get children's first placement right." The fostering manager said that he is not aware of an out of authority placement being refused if it was identified as the best way of meeting a child's need. This view was confirmed by the Placements Manager who cited a recent example where an out of authority placement is being arranged despite the availability of an in-house placement because the social worker did not consider it suitable for the child.

Newcastle social services gave inspectors information that shows that 62% of foster placements made in the 12 months to 31/03/06 were emergency placements with this figure rising to 80% for placements of children aged 10 and over. The Placements Manager said that his experience is in accordance with these figures. He said that, where family support teams have been giving intensive support to keep families together, often when things finally break down a placement is needed the same day. Work needs to take place to reduce this high percentage of emergency placements to enable foster carers to receive good information about the child and to enable good matching between children and the carers identified for them. Over this same period there were only four unplanned endings of placements where children had lived with carers for over three months; this suggests good work takes place to maintain placements when they are made. This was confirmed by placing social workers, 80% of whom said the service is good or excellent at promoting placement stability for children.

Two foster carers cited examples where there had been big delays in moving children from foster into adoptive placements. One said of a long delay had occurred for an 8 year old child whose adoption report had been already been completed. She said this delay was caused by the child's social worker and her link worker being off work and a delay with the adoption panel. Another said that a child had been initially been placed with her for two weeks over two and half years ago. She said the service was "doing the adoption now" because workers were on long-term sick leave and were not replaced. She said the child has now settled in and does not want to leave the foster carer. Another carer, however, said a situation of adoption she had been involved in went very well, "I did my first adoption in (month) which went really well, broke my heart but he's gone to a fab family, well planned." Inspectors accept that adoption arrangements are not the responsibility of the fostering service but these situations have affected the outcomes experienced by the children concerned and the service should examine how this process can be made more effective where necessary.

All parties spoken to said that the fostering service needs more foster carers and many said that placements with independent providers are used because of a lack of in house carers, not because of a child's specific needs. This lack of foster carers is resulting in a lack of ability to develop a strategy to develop the in house provision of foster carers alongside planned commissioning foster placements from external agencies and an inability to match consistently well.

This is leading to a service that is 'patchy' and produces good outcomes based on individual staff members and foster carers hard work and relationships rather than a on a robust, structured and well planned service. A number of people interviewed, both foster carers and professional staff, said that a significant increase in spending on recruiting and rewarding foster carers (both financially and in support terms) is needed to allow future savings to be made by reducing the frequency of use of independent agency placements. One professional said, "It's all about 'Invest to Save' but it's not working."

Information about how to keep children safe, including child protection arrangements, is provided for carers in the foster carer handbook and foster carers receive child protection training during their initial assessment training. Ongoing training in child protection is provided by the fostering service, as is safe caring training, though the service's record of foster carer training was not fully completed so it was difficult to assess numbers of carers undertaking this training. Independent Reviewing Officers, who chair young people's and foster carers' reviews, stated in interview that, from their experience, foster carers need to have more frequent training in these areas. Foster carers' files examined contained safe caring policies, in relation to their home and the care they provide, these were recent and foster carers spoken to told inspectors how they had been helped to develop these.

Foster carers are also provided with beating bullying training, which a large proportion of carers have completed. Only 3 out of 24 children who returned questionnaires said they are sometimes bullied and none of these situations were related to the foster placement. In all these situations the foster carer was aware of the situation, as they had helped the child to complete the survey form; details were passed to manager to ensure appropriate action taken.

All young people consulted said they are well cared for in their foster home and social workers views on how well children are being cared for were very positive with 18% regarding the care as excellent, 75% as good and 7% adequate. No social workers thought the child they were responsible for was being cared for poorly.

The foster carer handbook and foster carer agreement sets out that corporal punishment is not acceptable and training is provided for foster carers. As the foster carer training record was not fully completed, however, it was not possible to identify the frequency of this training or how many carers had taken part. None of the foster carers who the inspectors case tracked said they had done training in behaviour management. Guidance is in place for carers regarding the procedure to follow when a child is missing from home The fostering service manager has an effective system in place for monitoring allegations and complaints and ensuring action is taken to follow these through.

Recruitment records for staff examined demonstrated that a thorough and careful recruitment procedure is operated that complies with Regulation 20 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The records did not demonstrate that written references taken up for new staff members had been verified by telephone call but the manager said that the recent appointments examined had been made from staff already working for the authority so references were from known people. Staff employed in social work positions are appropriately qualified and trained. Those spoken to said that good levels of training and support are provided. The manager is suitably qualified and demonstrated a good understanding and knowledge of the service and its needs.

Attendance at a meeting of the fostering panel demonstrated that panel is effective at considering cases presented to it and panel minutes examined confirmed this and the good range of skills and experience of its members. Commendably, the panel give detailed consideration to the needs of young people and how their decisions regarding foster carer approval and reviews affect children. Very close consideration was given to a 'family and friends' foster carer assessment presented to it and panel required further work by professionals before it will reconsider the application. It is also commendable to note that all foster carer exemptions, made either for number or category are taken to panel for consideration and panel were seen to be thoughtful in considering whether exemptions could be dealt more with in better ways such as changes of approval status.

All foster carers' reviews are taken to panel for consideration. Some parties said that there can be a delay in taking reviews to panel because of its high workload but said that this is improving as panel have worked hard to reduce any backlog. The meeting of panel attended by the inspector gave close consideration of foster carer reviews brought to it. In one instance it was robust in requiring much more information about a specific situation before it could deal with the review. In this situation a review had been brought to panel without reports from the social workers of the children placed and panel members and the fostering manager, who acts as an adviser to panel, stated strongly that these views are needed before reviews and set out the action required before the case could be considered.

Panel was robust in ensuring that foster carers' Criminal Records Bureau and medical checks are suitably up-to-date.

In one foster carer's assessment record examined, one reference for the foster carer was taken up after the panel meeting but the record of the corresponding panel meeting did not show any discussion of this. Similarly, some documents presented to panel had minor pieces of information not completed and this fact was not noted by panel. Panel should take the opportunity of performing a quality assurance function by noting areas where information presented to it is not complete or of sufficient quality and referring this back to the fostering manager to address.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13, 31

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Children are generally well supported educationally although information sharing and support can be hampered by a lack of staffing stability in children's social work teams. Foster carers get good support to help them care for children with a wide range of needs and from different ethnic backgrounds and the service is making good efforts to increase its provision this area.

EVIDENCE:

The service provides foster carers with good information about promoting equality and diversity within the foster carer handbook and issues surrounding this are covered in foster carers' approval training. Carers visited confirmed they had done this training. Good arrangements are in place to provide ongoing training for foster carers.

Carers' views about how the service addresses equality and diversity issues were generally positive. 27% thought the service was excellent in this area, 45% good and 22% adequate. Only 6% thought the service is poor at dealing with equality and diversity issues. There were, however, some instances cited where foster carers considered that insufficient support and information was available. One said, "Service provides all the necessary information but only in English it should provide information in my language." The same carer also said, however, that the service provides "a bi-lingual worker to come regularly." The manager said the development of detailed information in

different languages had been discussed but the service has an expectation that foster carers will have some ability in English to be able to work within the LAC system. The authority has a telephone translation service available. One carer wrote in the survey form, "I do not know much English but I have found that the service do not treat me differently, which is good."

12% of social workers who responded said the service is excellent at addressing issues of equality and diversity such as culture, ethnicity and disability, 70% considered the service to be good and 18% adequate. None considered the service to be poor in this area.

Some placing social workers said that there is a shortage of placements for children from ethnic minority backgrounds. The fostering service has a specific post to work to recruit and assess carers from ethnic minority groups and to provide training and the numbers of foster carers from ethnic minority backgrounds has increased in the last year. The service also provides support carers from ethnic minority backgrounds to support white carers who might have a child from a different culture or ethnic background in placement with them. One black foster child case tracked during the inspection had been placed in a foster placement that was described, during the assessment, as not really suitable for a black child because of the demographic make-up of the area. The child and all parties spoken to including the child said that the placement was working well and the child was very happy living there. One family and friends placement examined showed that very good work had been done to keep children from an ethnic minority background in their own family and community rather than moving them to foster carers they did not know.

A shared care placement for a young child with learning disabilities was examined and was also producing very good outcomes for that child and his family.

Foster carers reported undertaking "This is Me" training which encourages an understanding of the needs of looked after children and training records provided confirmation of this.

The fostering manager and Head of Service told inspectors how children's social services are developing closer links with the education service as part of the authority's 'Transformation Programme'. The foster carers' handbook provides carers with good information about promoting education for fostered children and working with the different services involved. Newcastle's figures show a low level (less than 3%) of fixed term school exclusions for looked after children, the great majority of whom are fostered. The fostering manager expressed the view that the service supports official exclusions well but is not as good at picking up and responding to support needed from unofficial exclusions. Children's files examined contained Personal Education Plans (PEP) and Statements of Special Educational Need (SEN) where appropriate.

Young people's responses in questionnaire showed that 88% of young people think that they always get the right help with their education. Children cited examples of how they are helped including, "They (foster carers) help me at home studying and when I'm on my way to school they give me confidence", "They help me do my homework and behave myself at school." "My foster carers are helping me find my job and they are very supportive with me when I have an idea for my job in the future but I'm staying on at school for further education", "I get help to learn about budgeting for when I move into my own house, help with basic household tasks such as cooking."

When asked about the support provided to them to meet children's educational needs, 23% of foster carers thought this was excellent, 50% consider it to be good, 13% adequate and 13% poor. Comments from carers included, "We've had good help with our children's education, everybody sees it as important", "We have a child at the moment who has been getting extra help out of school that has been paid for and he has made such progress." Some more negative comments were made also, "A child we had, had to move on mostly because of school but no-one would listen or have a meeting" and "The educational team have tried twice to get my child a suitable placement but failed due to service restrictions."

When asked the same question, three quarters (73%) of social workers thought the service's support for children's education is good. 9% thought it excellent and 18% adequate, none considered it poor. One social worker reported how a child had been offered extra tuition and a number described how the work with education colleagues to access services for children.

With regard to how well the fostering service supports children to access activities in the community foster carers gave a mixed response. 6% said the support is excellent, 34% good and 28% said it was adequate. 31%, however, said that support is poor. Carers who expressed this view made comments including "We are told to seek activities on behalf of the child but not supported." One carer when asked what support the service provided for children's leisure interests said "None at all." Some carers blamed foster carers' allowances and mileage allowance as one of the difficulties in this area. Other carers, however, said "There is always transport if needed and information and support available", "The maxi cards are a great resource" (they allow foster carers and children to access leisure facilities free of charge) and "FUN (Fostering Under Newcastle) run by carers organises lots of activities for children." Social workers responses in this area showed that 28% consider the service to be excellent, 56% good and 16% adequate; none considered the service to be poor at supporting children to access activities and leisure interests.

Evidence gathered from case tracking showed some positive educational outcomes for children, though one child in a short term placement was not happy as she thought that the authority were making her move from her own

school because of the expense of the taxi fare. The fostering manager said he did not think that the taxi fare would be the issue as, normally, children's school placement would be maintained for a year before a decision is taken to move schools. The young person and foster carers said that her foster carer was working to ensure that her social relationships with her school friends were maintained despite the distance. The carer had taken the young person by car to collect her school friend and had taken them on a social activity and had so encouraged friends to visit the young person at the foster home and provided transport for this. Inspectors recommend that this situation be examined and the move of school should be explored with the child concerned.

A number of foster carers interviewed said that support for the education of the young people placed with them "comes down to who the social worker is or how loud the foster carer shouts up." This reflects some of the views expressed by carers elsewhere in this report and it is recommended that the service gives attention to stabilising staffing levels within children's social work teams and the development of systems and procedures to ensure that quality of practice is not dependent on individual personalities.

Foster placements for the shared care service are managed by the children with disabilities team. This team supports fourteen foster carers with one supervising social worker who also does the matching of children to carers and arranges the placement. The supervising social worker in this service has not carried out any assessments of new carers but said that she would be responsible for assessing any new applicants to become shared care foster carers. This worker said that she has not had any training in undertaking foster carer assessments and it is important that this training is provided prior to her undertaking this task. Newcastle Social Services needs to consider how it can manage and supervise the supervising social worker aspects of this role from within the fostering team to ensure consistency of practice and quality.

A shared care fostering situation was case tracked as part of the inspection. This situation showed very good working relationships between the placing social worker, supervising social worker and foster carer that are producing good outcomes for the child and family. The inspector noted how a relatively low level of support to the child and family had prevented what could have resulted in a breakdown of the family. The foster carer visited had undertaken suitable training and the placement was being well supervised and monitored.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10, 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Children generally get good support to maintain contact with their family and friends. Children are listened to and can influence the care they receive but arrangements to seek children's views about how the fostering service operates generally could be strengthened.

EVIDENCE:

Information about children's contact with their families and friends is included in the foster carer handbook. The fostering service uses a foster placement agreement document along with LAC documents Placement Plan Parts 1 and 2 and these documents set out the specific arrangements for supporting the individual child's contact with their families.

Foster carers consulted described the range of involvement they have with contact including, transporting children to contact, supervising visits and facilitating contact in their own homes. One carer said, "My foster child speaks to and visits her siblings regularly, they visit us and we go to their house. She has made friends and they visit each other's houses." Some carers expressed the view that the authority's support of children's contact arrangements was not always as good as it could be because of sickness levels and staff turnover in the children's social work teams. One said, "Contact can be a bit hit and miss depending whether they have anyone to supervise it – this causes problems for the child."

A number of carers expressed the view that car mileage allowances paid by the authority are too low and that they are not reimbursed for the first 25 miles they drive. They said that they are expected to provide transport to contact but because of this, some carers are refusing to use their cars, as they are subsidising contact out of their own pocket. The fostering service should address this situation with carers who feel this way in order to ensure that children's contact with their families is not affected.

Children spoken to during the inspection who were able to comment were satisfied with the way that they have with their care. Those children who returned questionnaires were positive about how they are consulted. 86% said their carers always listen to them and take notice of their opinions. The remaining 14% said they are usually or sometimes listened to. No young person said their opinions are not listened to. Comments from children included, "My foster carers always listen to me and help me when I need it", "My carers listens to my views and takes them into account always" and "I can sometimes make my own decisions and sometimes I can't. My carers help me in every way possible."

A similar high proportion of children said that their social workers listen to them and take their opinions into account. 78% said this always happens and the remaining 22% said this is the case usually or sometimes. Children made comments about this including, "I talk to him (social worker) on my own when I need to" and "I can always count on my social worker as she listens to me, she's always there for me and she's the best social worker a child could ask for and she's very straightforward."

Children consulted know who to speak to if they have a problem with 92% saying they always know who to speak to and 8% saying they usually or sometimes know. Additionally, 88% who responded said they know how to make a complaint. A few of the children spoken to said they have not received a copy of the young person's guide. The manager said this is the responsibility of the young person's social worker to give children one and he would make sure that all teams have sufficient copies.

Foster carers' views about how well children are involved in decisions about their everyday lives varied. 26% said they consider this to be excellent, 38% said good, 26% adequate and 9% poor. Comments ranged from "They keep all the children involved in all decisions involving their future and listen to all the questions the children have" and "My foster children are always consulted in all aspects of decisions that are made involving themselves" to "Very few social workers ask the children's opinions, they are usually just told this or that will happen." One carer said, "Social workers try their best but there is a rapid turnover in staff. Many children build a trusting relationship only to have their social worker leave and be replaced – back to square one."

14% of social workers asked the same question thought the situation is excellent, 78% thought it was good, 8% said adequate. No social worker considered children's level of involvement in everyday decisions about their lives to be poor. One social worker said, "(Young person) is given every opportunity to discuss her views and comment on anything she would like altered."

When asked how they rated the service in involving children in how the fostering service is run, 7% said they thought it excellent, 40% good, 33% adequate and 20% rated it poor. Foster carer's comments ranged from "They are always invited to various meetings or workshops which they are actively involved in decision making if they choose to participate" to "I've never known a child I've looked after being asked about how the service is run." Social workers' views on the same questions were as follows: 2% excellent, 47% good, 42% adequate and 9% poor. One placing social worker expressed the view that involvement for children with disabilities was not good enough. "The young people I work with who have learning disabilities have very limited involvement. Involvement needs to be accessible to young people who have learning disabilities and for this not just to be tokenism." This however, was an isolated view and reflects a difficulty faced by all services.

The fostering service runs some children's activities and groups but there is no regular consultation group taking place. All parties consulted commented on some of the difficulties involved in getting children to take part in regular consultation groups but the service develops ways of gathering children's views about how the service operates on a regular basis.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

29

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. The fostering service has an effective system for making foster carer payments but the level of allowances does not promote stability and appropriate matching by encouraging the recruitment and retention of carers.

EVIDENCE:

A number of foster carers consulted expressed the view that foster carer payments is a problem for the service. They expressed the view that the financial climate is one of cuts and economies and this has affected foster carer payments. Some of these foster carers told inspectors that they consider that payments to carers do not reward training or experience and there is no payment for skills programme despite several years of discussion. Several carers said, either when spoken to or in their questionnaires, that they are considering moving to foster with an independent agency citing allowances as part of this reason. One said "Will move to another agency when final placement ends. We are poorly paid for the job we have to undertake we rely on support from other carers." A significant number of carers said that foster carers working for other authorities and agencies receive higher allowances than those in Newcastle.

Some carers were also unhappy with a change in the way payments are made to carers providing respite care, which they felt, meant their payment had been cut without consultation or explanation. "Reduction in respite carers' payments is stopping activities and making carers leave." The manager said, and provided evidence to show, that this did take place and explained that the action was taken to stop payments being made to both the main carer and the

respite carer for the same day. Other carers consulted did not consider this to be a problem and a number said they agreed with the change.

Mileage payments for car use were also cited as a problem by some carers who said the payment does not include the first 25 miles driven and the payment had not been increased for ten years. One said and some others agreed that this means that carers are "expected to subsidise the authority's child care out of their own pockets." One carer said, in his questionnaire response, "Newcastle Social Services are in breach of the government's National Minimum Standards, as a carer who transports a foster child (to school, contact, meetings) is out of pocket. The allowance does not reflect the true cost of caring for children in our care." The majority of carers consulted however when asked how the fostering service should improve did not cite allowances as a problem.

Carers also expressed the view that the high level of use of independent fostering placements is expensive and this means funding is not available to reward in-house carers appropriately. This view was reflected by a number of placing social workers. The manager said that he wants to develop a strategy for the service that will lead to "a mixed economy of foster care (in-house and independent) that will include, proper payment for skills and rewards and recognition for carers that will be based on planned commissioning and lead to a more skilled and supported in-house group of foster carers."

The perceptions about allowances and mileage payments expressed by some carers should be addressed with carers as they are negatively affecting the relationships between some carers and the fostering service.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 32

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Arrangements for the support, training and review of foster carers are generally satisfactory though work to encourage the take up of training by foster carers could be improved. Staff turnover within the children's social work teams is causing some problems for foster carers and children. The quality of recording in children's files is not always good enough to properly support the care provided to them.

EVIDENCE:

Since the last inspection the fostering service has recruited new staff members and a deputy manager; this has enabled an analysis of case loads and a reduction in the number of carers that supervising social workers support. This recruitment has also allowed supervising social workers to take on other responsibilities such as training, arranging social/support activities and developing links with the children's social work teams. These should help address some of the communication issues identified during this inspection.

Carers were generally very positive about the support provided to them from the fostering service. 26% rated this support as excellent, 37% as good and 32% as adequate. 5% considered the support to be poor. Comments made by foster carers included, "We feel that they are very supportive and only need to ring when we are unsure about any issues", "The service supports us to meet the needs of children as well as it possibly can", "I am satisfied with the support I get from social services and aware that it is not easy in many circumstances for them", "100% support, advice is always a hand", "Our link worker is very helpful and supports us" and "Our supervising social worker is spot-on, as are the social workers involved in the children's lives. We have a huge respect for the support we receive." A significant number of carers cited this support as the best thing about the fostering service overall.

Carers who criticised the support provided and those who had experienced problems blamed high workloads and staff shortages rather than failings of staff members in the fostering team. They said that the service has struggled to provide enough support to carers when their own supervising social worker is off work. One said, "Need to give support to carers when their own link worker is off ill" and another commented, "It's all right if your links worker is around but it all falls apart when they go off as no-one knows anything about you and you never speak to the same person twice." The manager said that recruitment within the fostering team has improved this situation greatly. There is a duty system in the team and the manager can be contacted for support where needed.

Fostering and children's social workers spoken to were motivated and said that they get good training although all parties spoken to said that recruitment difficulties and a high level of staff turnover means that workloads are high. The service has a recruitment strategy to recruit foster families from ethnic minority backgrounds and has a worker employed to work in this areas and support foster carers. Recruitment in the last twelve months has balanced the number of carers who left the service for various reasons and the number of carers as the end of March 2006 was practically the same as 12 months earlier.

Foster carer assessments viewed were thorough and detailed and foster carers spoken to said they felt the assessment process was thorough and appropriate. One said, "I was worried that the social workers would be judgemental but it was really positive, I learned a lot and they were very honest with me."

Assessments cover applicants' competences and childcare skills and experience as well as attitudes and relationships and good training is provided during the assessment process.

The assessments seen for the 'shared care' fostering service and 'family and friends' carers were similarly detailed and thorough. The supervising social worker for the shared care service, who had not undertaken an assessment, has not had training in undertaking foster carer assessments and must receive this training before undertaking an assessment. The family and friends assessment seen was effective in balancing the need for a thorough assessment and recognising the particular circumstances of the family members being assessed and their relationship to the child. This assessment was carried out in an appropriate timescale though there was a delay in the receipt of CRB clearance outside the control of the fostering service.

Arrangements are in place for the management and support of carers that include training, information, supervision and support, respite care and reviews. Carers receive a handbook, which contains useful information and guidance about their roles and problems they might face including signposts to other sources of help.

The service's arrangements for foster carers' reviews is effective with all carers being reviewed six months after their approval and then yearly with all reviews being taken to fostering panel. Some carers said that there was a delay in taking completed reviews to panel and having them approved because of panel's workload. This was evidenced from case tracking where in a few situations it was noted that there had been six months delay or more. The manager and some carers said that this problem is getting better now and panel sometimes does full days to make sure that a backlog of reviews does not build up. One foster carer's review presented to panel whilst the inspector was in attendance did not include comments from the social workers of the children in placement or the child old enough to comment. Additionally, because of a change in supervising social worker, the information contained in the supervising social worker's report was based on file information, as the new worker had not visited the foster carer. The panel were robust in dealing with this review and required further work to be undertaken before it could be considered. The manager stated that, in his opinion, reviews should not be presented to panel without information from the child's social worker. It is also necessary that reviews include the views of all parties concerned including the child in placement and they should not take place until a recent visit to the foster carer's home has been undertaken by the supervising social worker writing the report.

Some of foster carer files looked at contained a copy of the minutes of the panel that considered their approval but these were not usually in place for reviews. Additionally, files seen did not contain copies of the notice of approval from the agency decision maker. This meant that it was difficult in some cases to follow the carers approval history from initial assessment through any changes of approval agreed at reviews to their current approval.

The opinions of people consulted about the quality of communication between foster carers, supervising social workers and placing social workers were generally positive. 20% of social workers consider the quality of information received about the child from the service is excellent, 62% think it good, 14% adequate and 4% poor. Social workers spoken to said things usually worked well and cited good relationships between social workers and the fostering team although occasional problems were cited. One social worker said, "There are some fabulous foster carers who get good support and we work together well but occasionally the fostering team can run away with themselves when they make decisions." This person cited an example in which respite care was arranged, without the social worker being informed, for a carer at a time when a child needed a lot of stability as a planned move was taking place.

Arrangements for the supervision of foster carers are effective and foster carers' files examined contained records of supervisory visits that occurred with appropriate frequency. Foster carers spoken to confirmed that supervision takes place and records and discussion with foster carers showed that occasional unannounced visits take place. The service has developed and started to use a new document to improve the structure and recording of foster carers' supervision sessions. Carers have foster carer agreements in place.

The manager has an effective system for monitoring any complaints or allegations made and a duty worker system is in place in the fostering team for support during office hours. Arrangements are in place whereby foster carers provide an out of hours support service. The manager said he is developing a "buddy" system whereby more experienced carers or those who are considering retiring provide on going support to newer carers.

The fostering service provides carers with a wide range of training including diversity, educational issues, child protection and abuse, drug awareness, HIV/Aids, behaviour management, report writing, separation and loss. The manager said that take up by foster carers is variable and he is working to encourage carers to undertake ongoing training. A number of foster carers said that providing them with childcare support would enable them to take part in more training. Pre-approval training is very thorough; the manager said he aims to link this more closely with ongoing training to promote continuous development. Records of carers undertaking this training were not fully completed however and as such it was difficult to monitor the training being

undertaken by individual carers. Since the last inspection, significant progress has been made towards all carers getting a first aid qualification though there is still more work to do to ensure all carers have this qualification. Commendably a large percentage of foster carers have undertaken beating bullying training.

The manager said that the authority will pay for foster carers to undertake NVQ Level 3 in childcare. Twelve carers have this qualification and one was undertaking this training when the information was supplied. Foster carers said that completing NVQ 3 is not recognised or rewarded by the system of foster carer payments and this reduces the incentive to undertake this training. A number of carers have other qualifications relevant to their fostering work. The manager said that he hoped a system of payment for skills within the fostering allowances would be developed that would reward foster carers for undertaking training.

Examination of young people's files during the inspection showed that, generally, all the required LAC documentation about the child was in place. Not all these documents were completed fully or in sufficient detail however. Examples of this include Essential Information Records (EIR) Parts 1 and 2 not dated and medical information, hospital and education sections left blank. Additionally in the case of one child the Placement Plan Part 1 and EIR Part 2 were out of date and referred to the wrong foster carer and the Placement Plan Part 2 had not been signed by any of the parties cited as agreeing to it. There was, however, evidence to show that reviews take place within timescale. LAC information about the child placed with them is retained on foster carers' file for reference by the fostering service and foster carer's recording and their summary reports observed were helpful in assisting a child to understand events happening to them.

The service has developed its process for ensuring that, where 'family and friends' of a child are assessed to be foster carers for the child (also known as kinship carers) this takes place in a timely yet thorough manner. The first part of the assessment including statutory checks is carried out by the child's social worker and taken to fostering panel for an interim decision. Once panel are satisfied with this information, the fostering team undertakes the second part of the assessment and takes this back to panel for final approval. The manager and head of service said that there has been an increase in the number of children placed with family and friends carers over the last year.

The 'family and friends' fostering situation case tracked showed that a thorough, detailed assessment was carried out with the first part of the assessment going to panel within the six week period specified by Regulation 38 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. This assessment was clearly undertaken with sensitivity to the family's situation and the particular difficulties of caring for a family member. The foster carer case tracked had undertaken training since approval as well as going through pre-approval

training individually with a worker fluent in her own language. Inspectors noted a very positive outcome for the children in this situation in which they were able to remain with members of their close family within their extended family and culture.

However, the fostering service had only become aware of these children and the assessment started after the children had been placed with their family members for 18 months. During this time the authority's records show that the children were not 'looked after' by the authority even though social services were responsible for arranging the placement with the children's family and were making conditions about the family's behaviour that would result in the child being placed with foster carers if the family did not agree. Staff explained that some delay had occurred because of a legal situation and decisions to be made by the family. Nevertheless it was a failing on behalf of the authority that this situation was allowed to continue for so long while children were living with family members whose suitability had not been assessed.

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	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	2
8	1
9	2
15	3
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
31	2

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	2

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	2

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

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
1	FS8FS9FS12	24	The local authority needs to ensure that all foster carers receive as much information as possible about the child at the time the placement is made.	18/08/06
2	FS9 FS12 FS24	17	The local authority should ensure that Looked After Children documentation is completed in full and with sufficient detail to properly support the care of the child concerned.	18/08/06
3	FS6	29	Health and safety checklists for carers' homes must be completed in a thorough manner and updated regularly. The checklist relating to the shared care foster carer visited must be updated in respect of the pond.	18/08/06
4	FS9 FS23	12	The fostering service must ensure that all foster carers receive regularly updated child protection and safe caring training.	22/12/06
5	FS9 FS23	13	All foster carers must receive training in behaviour management.	22/12/06
6	FS31	10	Newcastle Social Services must give consideration as to how the	27/10/06

			supervising social worker aspects of the role within the shared care service can be managed and supervised from within the fostering team to ensure consistency of practice and quality.	
7	FS21	29	Foster carers' reviews must include the views of the child's social worker and, where possible, the child in placement.	18/08/06
8	FS32	38	The local authority must ensure that an assessment is started immediately when any placement with family and friends carers is made.	18/08/06

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	FS12	The fostering service should continue to work to ensure that each foster carer is provided with basic training in first aid.
2	FS8 FS12 FS13 FS11	The local authority should give urgent attention to stabilising staffing levels and turnover within the children's social work teams and develop systems to ensure that the quality of information and support given to foster carers and children does not depend on individual personalities and relationships.
3	FS8 FS12	Attention should be given to reducing the high proportion of emergency placements made in order to allow children to move, in a planned way, to well-matched carers who have sufficient information about them.
4	FS8	The local authority should take steps to ensure that any difficulties with staffing levels or sickness do not negatively affect children's adoption plans.
5	FS8	The local authority should develop a strategy that will increase the number and range of the in house provision of

		foster carers developed a planned commissioning of foster placements from external agencies in order to improve the service's ability to match placements effectively.
6	FS30	Panel should perform a quality assurance function by noting areas where information presented it is not complete or of sufficient quality and referring this back to the fostering manager to address.
7	FS7	The fostering service should continue to work to recruit additional foster carers from ethnic minority communities.
8	FS13	The local authority should explore, with the child case tracked, the specific situation in which she thought she would have to move schools whilst in a short-term placement because of the cost of the taxi fare.
9	FS17 FS31	The supervising social worker within the children with disabilities team should receive training in undertaking foster carer assessments before undertaking such an assessment.
10	FS11	The fostering service should develop a system for regularly consulting with children about the running of the service.
11	FS10FS29	The perceptions about allowances and mileage payments expressed by some carers should be addressed with carers as they are negatively affecting the relationships between some carers and the fostering service and according to some carers preventing children taking part in activities and affecting contact.
12	FS21	Foster carer's reviews should not be carried out without a recent visit to the foster carer's home, by the supervising social worker writing the report, taking place.
13	FS17 FS21	Foster carers' files should contain easily accessible information about the carer's approval history including the notice of initial approval and the notice of any change of approval
14	FS23	The fostering service should take steps to encourage and increase the take up of training by all foster carers.
15	FS23	The fostering service's record of foster carer training should be kept up-to-date in order to monitor the training received by all foster carers.

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