



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **National Fostering Agency Limited**

**Frays Court  
71 Cowley Road  
Uxbridge  
Middlesex  
UB8 2AE**

*Lead Inspector*  
Paula Eaton

*Key Announced Inspection*  
20th November 2006      09:40

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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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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](http://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](http://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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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	National Fostering Agency Limited
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Miss Elizabeth Ann Cowling
<b>Type of registration</b>	Fostering Agencies

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      8th February 2006

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

The National Fostering Agency, formerly the Fostering Agency until October 2003, was established in 1996 as an independent fostering agency. This inspection relates to the work carried out by the London area office based in Uxbridge. The National Fostering Agency has additional branches in East Anglia and Wales. These are managed separately. The National Fostering Agency now also has a branch in Scotland.

The agency provides short term and long term placements and within its range of fostering services the agency includes the placement of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum and children with special needs.

The agency also has a supported living service for young people leaving foster care and staffed mother and baby units. These services are not currently inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection and do not form part of this inspection report.

The National Fostering Agency operates a 24-hour on-call duty and emergency service. Link workers are on call to their foster carers on the same basis.

# **SUMMARY**

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

This statutory inspection took place over four days. Time was spent in the offices of the agency viewing case records, policies and procedures and interviewing staff. Two senior managers within the agency were spoken to and the Inspector also met with a variety of staff within the service. The Quality Assurance team were spoken to, two Duty team workers, three Supervising Social Workers, the Training Co-ordinator, Human Resources Manager and Duty Manager. Part of the fostering panel was also observed. Four foster carers were visited and four young people were also spoken to. A Foster Carers Forum meeting was also attended.

## **What the service does well:**

The agency has good record management systems in place that allows close monitoring of the operation of the agency.

The agency has a well qualified and experienced staff team that are able to meet the needs of foster carers and the children placed with them.

Foster carers feel well supported and are offered a comprehensive training programme.

The service has established an excellent Human Resources department and Quality Assurance Team.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

Since the last inspection the service has further developed the Human Resources department and is in the process of implementing a new Human Resources database.

The agency has also developed an effective Quality Assurance Team that are auditing and monitoring systems within the agency and reviewing policies and procedures.

The agency has also improved the Children's Guide and improved consultation with children and young people.

## **What they could do better:**

The agency must ensure that visits to foster carers are accurately recorded and reflect what has actually taken place. It is also important that the fostering panel procedures accurately reflect working practice.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

## **CONTENTS**

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

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 this service. The agency ensures the health needs of children are met with evidence of appropriate healthcare arrangements being in place.

## EVIDENCE:

Foster carers receive some training sessions around the emotional health of children during their preparation training and further information is contained in the Foster Carer's Portfolio on common health issues, medical issues and healthy lifestyles. However, it is recommended that foster carers receive some basic first aid training relevant to caring for children, as this is not currently available.

The child/young person are required to have an annual statutory medical. The Placement Consultant's monthly visits and the reports address any health concerns. The ability of foster carers' to meet the health needs of children and young people placed with them is recorded in the annual review of foster carers.

The Placing Authority retain responsibility for ensuring that the required local health services are available in the area a child is placed. The Placement Agreement contains information regarding the health needs of the child; the foster carer keeps a copy of this record whilst the child is placed with them.

The records viewed showed that foster carers are required to provide information on health matters for planning and reviews. The Placement Consultant computerised visit notes also included information regarding health issues.

The foster carers spoken to said that they had registered the children in their care with local GP's and that they had taken children to have dental check ups and eye tests as required. Foster carers are expected to maintain a record of all medical appointments and information on a health record form that they are given.

## 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 good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The service has adequate numbers of appropriately trained and experienced staff. The service matches children to carers of the same ethnic, cultural or religious background where possible and ensures that any gaps in the matching process are addressed. There are adequate systems in place to ensure that children are protected from abuse and neglect.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The agency is managed by suitably experienced and qualified managers and the agency has a stable management team. The agency renews Criminal Records Bureau checks on a three yearly basis and all references received are verified prior to a member of staff being employed. Evidence of this was seen in the staff recruitment files viewed.

Four foster carers were visited during this inspection. All four homes were safe, comfortable and warm homely environments for the young people placed there. The young people spoken to showed the Inspector their bedrooms and toys and clothes and seemed content in the foster carers homes. The foster carers records viewed showed that health and safety checks were taking place on an annual basis and there were no health and safety issues noted in the homes visited. The agency also checks to ensure that the foster carers cars are

appropriately insured for the transport of children. The Training Co-ordinator spoken to during the inspection said that health and safety training including food hygiene training was going to be provided for foster carers.

The agency has an appropriate matching policy in place that had been recently updated at the time of the inspection. The Placement Consultant for the foster carer, Child's Social Worker and the Duty Team, work together to ensure that an appropriate match is made. Matching considerations are recorded along with any gaps identified to ensure that foster carers receive the support they need to address these gaps and meet the needs of the child placed. It was noted that two young people had been placed on an emergency basis with foster carers who did not speak the same language as them. The Registered Manager said that the children's social workers were always aware of any language difficulties prior to placement and that where possible the agency linked young people up with other foster carers or young people who spoke the same language to support foster carers and prevent young people from feeling isolated.

The majority of placements made with the agency are emergency placements. Some planned placements do occur and in such incidences introductions are made to the foster carer before the placement is made.

The agency has very clear policies and procedures in place for responding to Child Protection issues. There is clear guidance for staff regarding what action should be taken if an allegation is made or a child protection issue comes to light. Foster carers are provided with training on Child Protection issues, safe caring and behaviour management.

The Foster Carer's Portfolio also contains information on 'whistle blowing' and the complaints procedure. Clear guidelines are given to foster carers about discipline and the unacceptability of corporal punishment and this is also included in the Foster Carer's Agreement. There are clear procedures in place for when a child absconds from a foster carers home.

There is a computerised record of complaints and allegations. The Commission for Social Care Inspection must be kept informed by the agency of relevant notifications in accordance with Regulation 43 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The National Fostering Agency's log of complaints and allegations did not match with records kept at the CSCI office. This requirement is restated from the previous inspection.

The employee records for five members of staff were viewed. All of them were in good order and contained all of the required information. At the last inspection a Human Resources Manager had just commenced work with the agency and a Human Resources team was being established. This team now comprises of two additional team members and the team deals with all Human Resource issues across the whole of the agency UK wide. A great deal has

improved in this area since the last inspection and the team has worked hard to put effective systems in place for dealing with staffing issues. This has included the development of a very clear and comprehensive database where all staff information will eventually be recorded including supervision, appraisal and training records. The system also allows the Human Resources Manager to track applications from prospective staff members, monitor staff checks and it will also remind staff about supervision etc. The recruitment policies and procedures for the agency had also been updated since the last inspection to incorporate new legislation regarding age discrimination. The Human Resources Manager is to be commended for her hard work and the improvements made in the Human Resources department of the agency.

Part of the fostering panel for the agency was observed. The panel has the required composition and the panel meeting discussions were appropriate. It was noted however that the panel Chair told prospective foster carers that 'the panel has approved you'. This is not acceptable as the panel should only be making recommendations to the agency decision maker. It was also noted in the panel procedures viewed that they stated that the decision making could be deferred to the panel Chair. This was discussed with the Registered Manager who was aware that this was not acceptable and said that all foster carers are approved by the agency decision maker and that the panel procedures should not have stated that the decision could be deferred to the panel Chair. The checks for three panel members were viewed. Although Criminal Records Bureau checks were in place it was noted that the agency had not taken up references for independent panel members. Panel members receive annual training as required.

# 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 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The fostering service values diversity and strives to meet the diverse needs of the looked after children it cares for. The educational provision for the children placed is satisfactory. An appropriate short-term break service is available

## **EVIDENCE:**

The referral system used provides evidence that the agency attempts to make appropriate matches on the basis of the cultural, religious and language needs of children. This is not always possible especially as the majority of placements made with the agency are emergency placements. The agency has foster carers from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

The foster carers visited were encouraging the young people in their care to pursue their interests and were involving them in various social activities. One family visited where three siblings were placed had been on numerous outings into Central London, to various community events and had also been on an annual holiday in the summer. The children showed the Inspector photographs of their outings and talked about the things they had done and seen.

The agency has developed an education policy since the last inspection that outlines clearly the expectations of foster carers and their responsibilities with regard to the children placed and their education. It provides information about actively encouraging learning through educational literature, using local library facilities and purchasing educational toys as well as ensuring children and

young people have access to a computer. The foster carers visited were aware of the importance of maintaining educational placements and young people had quiet areas to study in the homes. The foster carers spoken to said that they attend parents evenings and liaise with children's schools to monitor their progress.

The agency does not provide a short breaks service to birth parents but does provide a respite service for foster carers who require it.

# **Making a Positive Contribution**

## **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

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

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

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

10 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Contact arrangements are made clear and foster carers are supported to ensure that appropriate contact is maintained between children and their families. Some consultation takes place with children, young people and foster carers to ensure that their views are heard.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Contact arrangements are made clear in the Foster Placement Agreements and are considered at the referral stage to ensure that contact will be able to be maintained. Foster carers are supported to manage contact arrangements.

A Children's Guide is given to children when they are placed with a foster carer. This guide contains detailed information about what to expect and information regarding health, education and how to make a complaint is provided. The agency provides a service to children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds but has not yet produced the Children's Guide in any other languages.

Children are consulted before annual reviews take place and the agency has an informative newsletter that is regular distributed that contains information on a wide range of topics. Since the last inspection the agency has consulted the birth children of foster carers and a 'Sons and Daughter Group' had been piloted in North London. Staff were looking at ways of developing this further. Questionnaires had also been distributed to children regarding what they thought should be included in the Children's Guide and the responses to this



were seen. Clear information on how to make a complaint is included in the Children's Guide.

The agency has also established regional foster carers forums that allow groups of foster carers to meet with members of the management team and discuss any issues or forthcoming events on a six monthly basis. One such meeting was attended during the inspection where the discussion included the annual end of year event and forthcoming changes in legislation. There is also a national forum that meets annually.

# 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 good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Foster carers are paid a sufficient allowance to ensure they are able to meet the needs of the children placed with them.

### EVIDENCE:

Clear information is provided to foster carers regarding the fostering allowance and how this should be used to meet the needs of children and young people. The fostering allowance is reviewed annually and increased to allow for inflation.

Some start up costs are met by the agency depending on the individual need of the family and the child being placed. Also there is an exceptional cost element that can be used to cover school trips, books, music lessons, leisure trips etc.

The Registered Manager also said that a summer activity allowance of fifty pounds per week per child had been paid for the duration of the summer holidays.

# 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):**

1, 17, 21, 22, 23 and 24

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The agency has an appropriately qualified and experienced management team who support and organise the staff team effectively. The agency provides good quality training, support and supervision for foster carers. Appropriate records are maintained for children placed.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency has an appropriate Statement of Purpose in place that had been revised and updated in June 2006. It contains information about Children's Rights, the aims and objectives of the agency, information about the agency's procedures, general information about fostering, information about the complaints procedure and relevant contact details.

The agency has developed a Children's Guide in a bright and attractive format that should be appealing to children and young people. There is information regarding famous people who have been fostered, spaces to add personal information such as important contact numbers as well as contact details for advocacy services and information on how to make a complaint.

The agency has adequate numbers of staff and foster carers to meet the needs of the service. All of the social workers spoken to had clear caseloads and felt supported by the management team.

A senior Placement Consultant who was spoken to during the inspection outlined some of the recruitment strategies that had been used by the agency. She said that links had been made with local newspapers and that specific communities had been targeted in certain areas where foster carers from particular faiths were needed. For example, she said that leaflets had been distributed at Mosques in Croydon in an attempt to attract Muslim foster carers in that area. She also said that they had organised an open evening at a local school and sent letters/leaflets to local GP surgeries and libraries.

Clear guidance is provided to staff on the competencies and qualities to be considered during the assessment of prospective foster carers. The assessments that were viewed were comprehensive and covered all of the required areas.

The agency provides adequate support to foster carers. Monthly support groups are held which the foster carers spoken to said they found useful to share ideas. Foster carers are also sent a National Fostering Agency magazine that contains useful information and updates. For example, a recent edition had included information regarding new car safety legislation, information about training and 'success stories' from foster carers. The agency had also set up a Sons and Daughters groups as mentioned earlier. An annual end of year celebration was also due to take place in two weeks time on a boat in Central London.

From the records viewed it was evident that detailed annual foster carer review reports are prepared and foster carers and young people are encouraged to contribute to these.

It is the expectation the foster carers will be visited monthly by their Placement Consultant. The foster carers spoken to confirmed that they received monthly visits from their Placement Consultants however, the records viewed did not always reflect this. It was also noted that two of the visit records viewed had been completed prior to the visit taking place. It is important that foster carers records are kept up to date, are accurate and that these records are monitored by the management team.

The agency does have clear guidance in place for the supervision of foster carers. As well as the monthly visits there is an expectation that foster carers will be contacted by telephone on a weekly basis, that children's bedrooms will be checked every two months, that annual unannounced visits take place and that where possible the Placement Consultant is present when a child is placed.

The agency has a detailed Foster Carers Portfolio that contains comprehensive information for foster carers on the fostering task, expectations and important policies and procedures.

The agency has established a Quality Assurance Team who are taking responsibility for auditing and monitoring agency policies and procedures, assessments and looking at ways of improving consultation with foster carers and young people further. This has also included monitoring complaints and allegations.

The agency has a Training Co-ordinator who was spoken to during the inspection. The agency has developed a comprehensive training programme for foster carers and are looking ahead to ensure that the training provided is in line with any requirements that may be introduced as part of a registration process for foster carers. The training Co-ordinator said that the agency had improved and increased the number of training venues to try and ensure that foster carers do not have to travel for more than half an hour to attend training. He also said that weekend and evening training had been piloted but that attendance at these sessions had been poor. Therefore most training courses take place between 10am and 3pm and school holidays are avoided.

All case records relating to children are maintained on the agency's computer system. Any Local Authority Documents are kept by the child's Social Worker and the foster carer keeps a copy. There was very little information kept regarding children in the agency's office except for contacts with the children and any information relating to incidents and accidents. The importance of life story work is highlighted in the Foster Carers Portfolio. At one of the families visited two of the children placed showed the Inspector the photographs and memorabilia kept for them by the foster carers. The children were very animated when looking through and talking about the pictures and it was obviously very valuable to them. The foster carer had made an enormous effort to ensure events were recorded and remembered by the children.

# 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

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

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	3
<b>6</b>	3
<b>8</b>	3
<b>9</b>	2
<b>15</b>	4
<b>30</b>	2

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

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

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

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

YES

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
1.	FS9	43 Schedule 8	Event notifications must be forwarded to CSCI in writing as specified in Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	01/01/07
2	FS22	35(3)(b)	Satisfactory records must be maintained for all visits to foster carers and these must be accurate.	01/01/07
3	FS30	20(3)(d)	Recruitment records for independent panel members must include all of the required information as outlined in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002	01/02/07
4	FS30	28(4)	Procedures for the fostering panel must be clear regarding who approves recommendations made by the panel.	01/01/07

## **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 agency should consider providing first aid training for foster carers.



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