

inspection report

Fostering Services

London Borough of Hillingdon Fostering Service

Fostering & Adoption Service

855 Uxbridge Road

Hayes

Middlesex

UB4 8HZ

2nd February 2004 3rd February 2004 5th
February 2004 6th February 2004 25th
March 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

London Borough of Hillingdon Fostering Service

Address

Fostering & Adoption Service, 855 Uxbridge Road, Hayes,
Middlesex, UB4 8HZ

Local Authority Manager

Mrs Marion Rodin

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01895 277852

Address

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Middlesex, UB4 8HZ

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Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

11/03/03

Date of Inspection Visit		2nd February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Mr Gavin Thomas	074996
Name of Inspector	2	Paula Eaton	152891
Name of Inspector	3	Jane Collisson	079752
Name of Inspector	4	-	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		Not used	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		Not required	
Name of Establishment Representatives at the time of inspection		Marion Rodin and Robert Jones	

CONTENTS

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.
<p>The Fostering Service of the London Borough of Hillingdon is located in purpose-adapted Portokabin Offices on the Uxbridge Road, Hayes that is approximately 2 miles away from the Civic Centre, Uxbridge. The Service has a number of Foster Carers, which live in the Greater London Area and provide specific ethnic care to asylum seeking children. Respite care is offered to carers of looked after children and a small number of carers offer preventative respite for the Hillingdon Community. There is a short break scheme for carers of disabled children. Family/friends Care is currently being developed. The Team Manager is accountable to a Service Manager. There are two Assistant Team Mangers, 13 Social Work staff plus 1 vacancy and one Fostering Support Worker (Social Services Officer).</p>

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

At the previous inspection 3 requirements and 13 recommendations were identified. The 3 requirements were met. Of the 13 recommendations identified, 10 recommendations were met, 1 recommendation was partially met and 2 recommendations were not met. Outstanding recommendations have been restated in the body of this report. 10 surveys were received from Foster Children, 8 were received from Foster Carers and 19 were received from Placing Officers. Foster Children were positive about their placements, with the exception of three. One foster child stated that they dislike their placement and wanted to return to their family home. No specific reasons were given for disliking the placement. Two children were positive about their Foster Carers and placements. However, they did comment that their Foster Carers made them eat vegetables. Foster Carers were generally positive about the support of the Foster Service, training courses and communication. Matters and opinions raised by Foster Carers have been incorporated in the relevant standards of this report. These include the lack of computers for children to do their homework, the Fostering service not paying travel expenses for a long distance car journey and lack of information given for initial referrals. One Foster Carer did not believe that Foster Carers were treated equally and valued as professionals. Mixed views were given with regards to the support given by Supervising Social Workers and that of the Area Social Workers. The general view was that the Supervising Social Workers were readily available to assist and provide advice and support. The Area Social Work team were referred to as being "under resourced". As a result, children are sometimes left too long without an allocated Area Social Worker. Placing Officers were generally satisfied with the placements and quality of Foster Carers. 18 out of the 19 Placing Officers had not seen a copy of the Statement of Purpose or a NCSC inspection report. The Team Manager did explain that these documents would be available on request. The Statement of Purpose was also available on the London Borough of Hillingdon's intranet facility.

The Fostering Service had made good progress in recruiting additional Social Work staff. There was only one vacancy at the time of this inspection. The Fostering Service is proactive in looking towards alternate strategies and methods for recruiting additional Foster Carers, including Foster Carers for the Short Term Break scheme for children with Disabilities. All Social Work staff interviewed demonstrated sound knowledge of the work of the Fostering Service. All staff presented themselves in professional manner. The work of the Fostering Service was also demonstrated via good record keeping.

Training opportunities are available to Foster Carers and Social Work staff. However, Foster Carers indicated that the convenience of attending training is not always possible. The Fostering Service continues to address these matters with individual Foster Carers to enable them to attend training.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Under Section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 the Commission considers the Local Authority's Fostering Service fails to satisfy Regulatory requirements, which are not substantial

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	Reg 20(1)(a)(b) Schedule 1	FS3	Arrangements must be made to ensure that evidence of vetting documents kept in the Human Resources Department are maintained at all times.	24/09/03

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Gavin Thomas	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	_____	Signature	_____
Date	_____		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	Reg 20(1)(a)(b) Schedule 1	FS3	The Local Authority must ensure that documentary evidence is retained to confirm that Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 is met when recruiting new staff. This requirement is restated from the previous inspection.	31/07/04
2	Reg 43(1) Schedule 8	FS4	The Fostering Service must, without delay, notify the NCSC of all notifiable incidents as listed in Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	30/04/04
3	Reg 22 Schedule 2(1)(2)	FS25	Current statistics held on Foster Children and those working with the Fostering Service, must be updated to include details as stated in Schedule 2 (1)(2) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	31/05/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The statement of purpose should be updated to include the numbers, relevant qualifications and experience of staff, the numbers of children placed and the outcomes of all complaints received by the Fostering Service as stated in standard 1.4 of the national Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.
2	FS2	The Team Manager should achieve an NVQ Level 4 or equivalent management qualification by 2005. This recommendation is restated from the previous inspection.
3	FS6	All sections of the health and safety form should be completed at all times.
4	FS6	The exposed staircase identified in a Foster Families Home should be risk assessed and any necessary action taken with the Foster Carer to minimise the risk of a child/children having an accident.
5	FS10	The Fostering Service should address the inappropriateness of contact arrangements as addressed by a Foster Carer.
6	FS16	Administrative staff should be consulted regarding the matters they raised to reach an amicable solution.
7	FS18	The London Borough of Hillingdon should ensure that recruitment practices are more robust and inaccuracies are minimised.
8	FS19	A training programme specific to the staff team should be implemented.
9	FS24	Formal procedures should be implemented to ensure the safe transfer of files when a child is placed with an independent Fostering Agency.
10	FS32	The Fostering Service should demonstrate that adequate training and support is provided for family and friends who are approved carers. This recommendation is restated from the previous inspection.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent

5

Survey of placing authorities

YES

Foster carer survey

YES

Foster children survey

YES

Checks with other organisations and Individuals

NO

- Directors of Social services

NO

- Child protection officer

NO

- Specialist advisor (s)

NO

- Local Foster Care Association

NO

Tracking Individual welfare arrangements

YES

- Interview with children

YES

- Interview with foster carers

YES

- Interview with agency staff

YES

- Contact with parents

NO

- Contact with supervising social workers

YES

- Examination of files

YES

Individual interview with manager

YES

Information from provider

NO

Individual interviews with key staff

YES

Group discussion with staff

YES

Interview with panel chair

YES

Observation of foster carer training

NO

Observation of foster panel

YES

Inspection of policy/practice documents

YES

Inspection of records

YES

Interview with individual child

YES

Date of Inspection

02/02/04

Time of Inspection

10AM

Duration Of Inspection (hrs)

66

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

The scale ranges from:

4 - Standard Exceeded	(Commendable)
3 - Standard Met	(No Shortfalls)
2 - Standard Almost Met	(Minor Shortfalls)
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Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

A statement of purpose is in place. This document had been updated since the last inspection and contained a wealth of information. However, pages 3, 5 and 9 should be updated to include the numbers, relevant qualifications and experience of staff, the numbers of children placed and the outcomes of all complaints received by the Fostering Service. Documentary evidence examined, confirmed that the statement of purpose was approved by elected members. The Team Manager confirmed that the statement of purpose was available electronically on the London Borough of Hillingdon's "shared drive". This document was also available on request.

The Children's Guide was being printed at the time of this inspection. A copy of this document was subsequently supplied to the NCSC. The Children's Guide was very informative. It also included a range of resources and professional bodies a child may contact.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Team Manager has a Diploma in Applied Social Studies and a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW). The Team Manager is a qualified Social Worker. He also has experience in Family Placement schemes and Residential Units. The Service Manager is a qualified Social Worker. She also has 30 years experience in the care sector and extensive childcare and management experience. The Team Manager explained that he had registered to undertake an appropriate management qualification. The Team Manager should achieve this qualification by 2005. This recommendation is restated from the previous inspection.

The Inspector noted that effective leadership and management provided to the team were well maintained.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

Twelve personnel files were inspected for the purpose of this inspection. No progress had been made in meeting the requirements of Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Files examined did not contain all documents required including references and proof of identity. The content of the files were inconsistent. The Local Authority must ensure that documentary evidence is retained to confirm that Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 is met when recruiting new staff. Progress was being made in obtaining CRB (Criminal Record Bureau) checks for the Social Work team. A minimum of two people makes up the interview panel. The Team Manager confirmed that all staff are recruited within an equal opportunities framework.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The roles for managers and staff were clearly defined. Foster Carers spoken to confirmed that they receive their allowances as agreed with the Local Authority. The Fostering Service had produced an up to date guide on allowances. This document had been issued to all carers. Two notifiable incidents had occurred which were not reported to the NCSC. The Team Manager explained that the Fostering Service was awaiting the final outcomes of investigations for both incidents. The Fostering Service must, without delay, notify the NCSC of all notifiable incidents as listed in Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The Inspector can confirm that the NCSC has not received any complaints regarding this Fostering Service within the last twelve months. Matters relating to “conflicts of interest” are discussed with prospective staff and carers. The Service Manager explained that written evidence of this would be considered when application forms are next reviewed. Progress towards this will be monitored at the next inspection.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****4**

A newly appointed “Head of Children’s and Families” Manager had been appointed since the last inspection. The management structure set reflects a clear sense of accountability. Job descriptions have been reviewed and updated. Where necessary, new entrants have been made to make the job descriptions more specific to the Fostering Service. This supports good practice. The Service Manager had other management responsibilities within the London Borough of Hillingdon’s Children’s Resource Services. The Team Manager deputises in the absence of the Service Manager. All staff were aware of this arrangement. Two full time Assistant Team Managers were in post to support the Team Manager with the day to day running of the Fostering Service. One out of the two Assistant Team Managers were interviewed. The Assistant Team Manager confirmed that the management structure was supportive to all staff.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The suitability of premises to accommodate foster children was included in initial assessments. Ongoing monitoring processes were in place via monthly and unannounced visits to foster carer homes and annual reviews. The requirements of a safe environment were clearly set out in the Foster Carers handbook. This was also included in the "choosing to foster" training. A health and safety check list was in place. Although this was a good practice document for monitoring purposes, some of the sections on those forms examined were not fully completed, dated or signed. All sections of the forms should be completed at all times. The Inspectors visited four foster homes for the purpose of this inspection. All of the homes were very well kept and homely with comfortable and good quality facilities. Common hazards and risk factors were removed in accordance with the age and needs of children being fostered. Suitable arrangements were in place for the safety of the children where pets were kept. The foster children spoken to confirmed that they were satisfied with the facilities. One foster home did have an open staircase. Although it was reported that this had not posed a potential hazard, The exposed staircase should be risk assessed and any necessary action taken with the foster carer to minimise the risk of a child/children having an accident.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Good practice systems and guidance were in place to promote diversity and equality. Social Worker reports examined, confirmed that where applicable, children and foster carers receive appropriate guidance and support to manage any form of discrimination. The Fostering Team is guided and supported in monthly supervisions and team meetings for developing strategies and methods of promoting diversity. Suitability of placements are recognised when matching a child's needs with a foster carer. Members of the Social Work team did confirm however, that this is not always possible. Children's religious, ethnic and cultural needs/preferences are carried out as far as practicable once they are placed with a foster carer. Feedback from children and foster carers confirmed this. The Social Services Officer provides continuous support and resources to foster carers to develop their skills and understanding of children, who have unfamiliar cultural/religious needs/preferences. The Foster Carers monthly network support group promote a time for foster carers to exchange views, opinions and ideas. This supports good practice. One foster carer informed the Inspectors that they use the internet as a method of researching different cultures. Inspectors are of the opinion that this demonstrates a carer's commitment to meeting a child's diverse needs.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

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

The Fostering Service applies specific procedural guidance and interagency protocols to accommodate unaccompanied asylum seeking children at Heathrow airport. When emergency placements occur, the matching process is not strictly adhered to. Planned placements are discussed at team meetings. The jointly funded facility with Health/Education, the Abacus Centre, continues to provide valuable specialist advice/information. Feedback from some Foster Carers did indicate that the lack of information given when referrals are made could be problematic when a child's needs are not fully known. The Team Manager explained that as much information of a child's needs is given to Foster Carers for both planned and emergency admissions. Supervising Social Workers and the Social Service Officer provide Foster Carers with ongoing support and advice to meet any unknown needs of a child at the time of admission.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

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

Procedural guidance relating to anti bullying practices were available to Foster Cares via the Foster Carers handbook. Prospective Foster Carers receive training and guidance during the initial "choosing to foster" training and ongoing input from the Supervising Social Worker. The Team Manager explained that there was possible bullying occurring with one foster child in school. The Foster Carer confirmed this and explained the intentions to safeguard the child. Procedural guidance was in place for managing unauthorised absence. This included risk assessments and the completion of an incident form. The Fostering Service continues to provide an out of hour's service. One Foster Carer, who has accessed this facility, described it as being reassuring and helpful.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

99

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Contact arrangements are identified with the area Social Worker prior to and/or once a child is admitted into foster care. One Foster Carer did raise a matter with the Inspectors regarding the expectations of her in carrying out supervised visits with a child's birth parent independently, which were inappropriate. The Inspector addressed this matter with the Managers of the Fostering Service. This should be taken up with the Foster Carer. Review notes examined confirmed that contact arrangements are monitored by Supervising Social Workers. Contact arrangements were set out in care plans. One child spoken to was satisfied with the frequency of contact and how visits were conducted.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Methods of communication were well maintained. The children's guide includes details of the complaints procedure and a range of organisations children may contact. The Assistant Team Manager explained that Interpreters are used to communicate with children when required. Arrangements are also in place for Interpreters to be available via telephone. This supports good practice. Communication matters are identified when the "Form F" is completed and monitored by Supervising Social Workers once a Foster Carer has been approved.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

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

Health related matters are addressed with prospective Foster Carers as part of the "choosing to foster" training. Individualised matters are monitored via Supervising Social Worker visits. Records of visits examined confirmed this. Childlike illnesses are clearly set out in the Foster Carers handbook. Foster carers continue to receive ongoing support, guidance documents and access to a range of resources to assist them in the care of children and young people. Foster Carers are encouraged to attend training in First Aid and health and hygiene matters. Foster Carers spoken to confirmed this. Foster Carers also confirmed that the children placed in their care were registered with a GP. One Foster Carer was very positive about the prompt attention given to the children from the GP Practice and associated health services.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

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

Foster Carers are fully supported in ensuring that children's education is continued once they are admitted into Foster Care. The children spoken to were all satisfied with the support given to them by Foster Carers in continuing their education. The fostering service continues to promote its aims in keeping young people in their own schools. One child spoken to was very positive about their education and explained to the Inspectors the qualifications they hope to achieve in secondary/further education. Foster carers confirmed that they continue to attend school functions and open days. Arrangements were in place for funding school costs. Foster Carers spoken to confirmed this. However, two Foster Carers expressed dissatisfaction with the Fostering Service for not meeting their requests in providing computers for children to do their homework. The Team Manager confirmed that arrangements are now in place for computers to be delivered to Foster Carers homes in the very near future.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

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

The Social Services Officer and Supervising Social Workers are supportive to Foster Carers in assisting children/young people for moving on. Key tasks include personal safety, budgeting and finances, cooking and health and safety matters. Area Social Workers are responsible for implementing "Pathway Planning" processes. Supervising Social Workers explained that Area Social Workers would also assist Foster Carers in implementing a child's/young persons care plan in preparation for moving on.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Corporate recruitment policies and procedures were in place. All staff in post had been vetted via the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). Records examined confirmed this. All Supervising Social Workers in post had a relevant qualification. Foster Carers spoken to were positive about the support they receive from Supervising Social Workers. Foster Carers also indicated in their feedback the support shown to them. However, some Foster Carers did express concern with the lack of resources within the Area Social Work teams and was of the opinion that resources were too stretched. The Supervising Social Work contributed towards a wide range of experiences and backgrounds.

Total number of staff of the agency:

13

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

1

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

A management structure was in place. Formal supervision and appraisal systems were in place. Staff spoken to, were aware of the child protection procedures. All Supervising Social Workers had an allocated caseload. The Placement Service is responsible for monitoring the quality and appropriateness of placements for children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies. Administrative staff indicated that overall, administrative staff and Social Work staff worked well as one team. However, staff did raise some matters relating to the work conditions. These included the inappropriateness of the layout of desks in relation to the positioning of the air conditioning and lack of clarity in defining duties and accountability. Administrative staff explained that the team could benefit from additional staffing. The Service Manager confirmed that this was under discussion at management level. Administrative staff felt that they would benefit from appropriate training in the understanding of "fostering" to give them a better understanding of the service. These matters should be addressed with administrative staff in an effort to reach an amicable solution.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

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

All Supervising Social Workers were qualified and had a relevant qualification. There was one vacancy for a full time Supervising Social Worker. This had much improved since the last inspection. The Social Services Officer has a fundamental role in assisting Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers to provide an appropriate service for children placed in foster care. Social Workers were positive about the support they received from the Assistant Team Managers, Team Manager and Service Manager. This included “hands on” support in emergencies and difficult situations. The strategies for attracting and recruiting prospective Foster Carers was under review at the time of this inspection.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Staff spoken to, confirmed that they were aware of the whistle blowing policy. A valid insurance certificate was in place. One member of staff expressed dissatisfaction with the London Borough of Hillingdon’s recruitment processes. The member of staff explained that there were complicating matters in obtaining appropriate documentation and information when an application was made for a vacancy in the Borough. The member of staff explained that the assistance given by the management of the Fostering Team was valuable. The London Borough of Hillingdon should ensure that recruitment practices are more robust and inaccuracies are minimised.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The Fostering Service continues to provide ongoing training for both the Social Work team and foster carers. A “Borough” training programme was available for inspection purposes. Social Work staff and Foster Carers had access to this programme. The programme offered a wide range of training courses and programmes. However, the Fostering Service did not have a training programme which was specific to the staff team. This should be implemented to meet the criteria of this standard. Foster Carers and Social Work staff spoken to confirmed that training opportunities are available to them. However, Foster Carers did explain that the dates and times of some training were unsuitable due to childcare arrangements. The Team Manager explained that this is an ongoing matter, which is discussed with Foster Carers at annual reviews and meetings with Supervising Social Workers.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5) All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
<p>Staff spoken to, confirmed that they were in receipt of a contract of employment. Staff also confirmed that they receive monthly supervisions and six monthly appraisals. Staff meetings continue to be held on a regular basis. Staff spoken with, explained that the Team Manager and Service Manager are supportive and readily available to assist and advise. The systems for monitoring staff performance and providing staff support were well maintained. Observations throughout this inspection indicated that staff worked well as a team.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6) The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The Social Services Officer provides information and advice to Foster Carers and Foster children when required. Records of assistance or advice given by the Social Services Officer were thorough. Reports for annual reviews were well written and are retained on Foster Carer's files. Records examined indicated that the Fostering Social Workers and the Child's Social Worker, communicated when required. Good practice systems were in place to document evidence of telephone conversations and other forms of correspondence. Foster Carers were positive about the support they receive from the Supervising Social Workers. Carers also explained that staff made them welcome, when they visited the portacabin" offices. This was also observed at the time of the inspection.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10) The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Social Workers spoken to, confirmed that four weekly "announced" visits are made to Foster Carers homes. The Foster Carers "Good Practice Handbook" provides Foster Carers with a wealth of information. One Social Worker explained that Foster Carers are encouraged to use the handbook as a guide and for reference purposes. Once approved, all Foster Carers are required to agree and sign an agreement on the terms and conditions between themselves and the Fostering Service. Foster Carers spoken to were aware of their accountability and to whom they were accountable.</p>		

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

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

All Foster Carers were in receipt of the London Borough of Hillingdon's training programme. Foster Carers spoken to confirmed this. Foster Carers were required to complete a training request form prior to undertaking any training. The Manager approved any training undertaken by Foster Carers. As reported in standard 19 of this report, Foster Carers explained that the dates and times of some training are unsuitable due to childcare arrangements. Supervising Social Workers were aware of this and explained that the matter was being addressed as a team. Supervising Social Workers confirmed that they contribute to the initial training for prospective Foster Carers. Foster Carers spoken to explained that they draw from personal experiences and when required, will liaise with their Supervising Social Worker and/or the Social Service Officer for assistance and guidance.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

A policy on case recording was in place. Foster Carers were aware that confidential information should be stored in a secure manner. One Foster Carer stored information in a lockable filing cabinet. This was seen at the time of visiting the Foster Carers home. Supervising Social Workers monitor the appropriateness of storing information at reviews and other times when required. Case records examined for care tracking purposes were well maintained, up to date and in good order. The Team Manager explained that arrangements were in place for files to be transferred between an independent Fostering Agency and the Area Team when children are accommodated outside of the Fostering Service. However, there were no formal procedures in place to ensure the safe transfer of a child's file. This should be implemented.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Lockable facilities were provided for the storage of confidential records. The Fostering Service retained details of each child placed with the Fostering Service and each person working for the Fostering Service. Current statistics must be updated to include details as stated in Schedule 2 (1)(2) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			128
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			265
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			137
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			8
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			5
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	240.70	Maximum £	285.50

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There have been no changes to the premises since the last inspection. The premises and facilities are appropriate to support the operation of the service. Although the premises are located in a lorry park, the spaces used by lorries are mainly used at night. This does not hinder the work of the fostering service. The premises have easy access for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Internal facilities include baby changing facilities, disabled toilet, three meeting rooms, designated offices for the service manager and team manager, sufficient desks to seat all Social Workers, three fax machines, a reception area with seating, a water dispenser and a small kitchen. The premises are protected with a security alarm system. Access is solely by means of a key coded entry system. The premises are used as a base for training, sessional work with children, fostering panel meetings and a resource base. The premises were clean and well maintained at the time of this inspection.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

This standard is a Local Authority Fostering Service. The Service Manager is reported to have an overview as to overall budget in place and is responsible for monitoring the budget on a regular basis.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

It is understood that there are financial processes/systems in place to monitor the income and expenditure. This service is a Local Authority Fostering Service. This particular standard was not further explored during this inspection.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

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

A review of the allowances for Foster Carers was carried out in consultation with Foster Carers via a questionnaire and meetings, the Fostering Network, members and the London Borough of Hillingdon's legal department. The review was approved in December 2003 and implemented/published in February 2004. The policy now includes a disturbance allowance and a holiday allowance. The allowances paid to Foster Carers are due to be increased in line with inflation as in keeping with Council Policy. Carers spoken to confirmed that there were no issues in receiving their allowance. One Foster Carer did express dissatisfaction via the survey that the Fostering Service had refused to reimburse them with travel allowance as agreed, for transporting a foster child on a long distance journey. Subsequent to this inspection, the Team Manager confirmed that this matter has been resolved with the Foster Carer concerned.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
The Fostering Panel was observed on the 25 th March 2004. The panel was made up of a “chair”, a medical advisor, panel advisor, panel administrator/minute taker, a councillor, 4 observers including 2 NCSC Inspectors, a foster carer and 4 independent members. 9 cases were heard. 4 of which were foster carer annual reviews. The preparation for this panel was very well done. The cases presented to panel, brought about much discussion, debate and exploring for members of the panel. The chair ensured that each case was thoroughly examined. The chair also ensured that all members of the panel were fully involved throughout the panel. Where required, the expertise of the panel advisor was sought. The Team Manager confirmed that all members of the panel had been police checked. The Chair of the panel confirmed that she is independent to the Fostering Service. The chair and members of this panel observed are to be commended for their professional and structured approach when examining cases presented to them.		

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The Disabilities Team currently manages the short-term breaks scheme. The scheme is made up of Carers for children with Disabilities called "Family Link". The Team Manager explained that this scheme would be transferring to the sole responsibility of the Fostering Service within the next six months. This scheme is exceptionally small. A new post will be established for marketing the scheme and raising awareness of its purpose and benefits and to promote the profile for prospective carers. Funds to recruit to this post have been secured via the "Choice Protects Scheme".	3
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Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
The Fostering Service continues to support family and friends carers. The Family Link scheme for children with special needs is currently under review. The Team Manager explained that it is most likely that this scheme will become the sole responsibility of the Fostering Service in the near future. The Team Manager explained that approved carers for this scheme are provided with training and support. However, documentary evidence should be provided to demonstrate this in more detail. This recommendation is restated from the previous inspection.	2

PART C**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY****(where applicable)**

A Lay Assessor was not present on this inspection.

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th February 2004 and 25th March 2004 of London Borough of Hillingdon Fostering Service and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

An Action Plan has been received and is available on request at the West London Area Office.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

Note:

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

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

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

Action plan was required

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

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

No Provider's Agreement was received.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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