



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

Announced Inspection
8th, 9th, 23rd, 24th & 27th February 2006 9:20

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

| Reader Information | |
|---------------------------|---|
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service National Fostering Agency Limited

Address Frays Court
71 Cowley Road
Uxbridge
Middlesex
UB8 2AE

Telephone number 01895 200 300

Fax number 01895 200 222

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) National Fostering Agency Limited

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Miss Elizabeth Ann Cowling

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

No. of places registered (if applicable) 0

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 25th November 2004

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. There is a small South London office, which is the occasional base for staff in that area to use. The National Fostering Agency has additional branches in East Anglia and Wales. These are managed separately. The National Fostering Agency is currently in the process of expanding to other areas in the UK.

At the time of the Inspection, the Agency's foster carers had approximately nine hundred and forty children placed by a number of London Boroughs and Local Authorities in the counties around London. 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 inspection took place over five days and formed the annual statutory inspection for this agency. The first two days were spent at the offices of the fostering agency examining administrative records and interviewing staff. Nine members of staff in total were interviewed including Social Work staff, administrative staff, the manager, Human Resources Manager and Duty Manager. Three evenings were spent visiting foster carers and the children placed with them at their homes. In addition questionnaires were sent out to forty foster carers and forty looked after children. Only twenty five per cent of these were returned, however those that were returned were positive about the fostering agency and the support provided. Questionnaires were also sent out to placing authorities, however, none of these were completed or returned.

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.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has expanded its offices and developed a new management structure.

The agency has developed a new Human resources department and more efficient recruitment recording systems were in the process of being developed.

What they could do better:

More detailed recording needs to be in place for Social Work visits to foster carers and the agency needs to ensure that annual reviews take place on time.

All records need to contain the required information and be kept up to date.

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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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 outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

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

EVIDENCE:

The skills to Foster' course covers information on child development and emotional development, with an emphasis on arrested development due to the circumstances of the child. Further information is contained on the Foster Carer Portfolio on common health issues, medical issues and healthy lifestyles.

The child/young person will be required to have a statutory medical once they have been placed with a foster family. The link worker monthly visit and the report addresses 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 manager said that the Placing Authority retain the 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 Supervising Social Worker computerised visit notes also included information regarding health issues.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3, 6, 8, 9 and 15

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. Recruitment records do not always contain all of the required information.

EVIDENCE:

All of the staff involved in managing the National Fostering Agency are qualified Social Workers who have many years experience of working in services for children and fostering, generally within local authorities. Appropriate recruitment checks are carried out and telephone calls are now being made to follow up references.

All of the foster carer homes visited provided safe, comfortable and homely environments for children. The foster carers were all committed to providing a healthy and nurturing environment for the children placed with them. Foster carers were observed interacting with the children in their care and it was evident that the children were happy and well looked after. The children spoken to said that they were happy with their foster carers and felt able to talk to them and all of the children's rooms seen were personalised to suit the child's needs.

There were no health and safety issues noted at the foster families homes visited. Comprehensive information and guidance on health and safety issues is provided to foster carers in the Foster Carers Portfolio and all foster carers spoken to said that they had an up to date copy of this. It was also evident that annual health and safety checks were taking place at the foster carers homes.

The agency has a referral procedure in place that is managed by a duty team. The duty team take any referrals and look for an appropriate match from the vacancy list on the agency's computer system. The vacancy list is regularly updated and includes a short profile of the carer and their availability to assist with this process. The manager said that the onus is placed on the Placing Authority to decide if the placement is appropriate and then discussions take place to ensure that adequate resources are in place to meet the needs of the child.

The manager said that the majority of placements made are emergency placement but that some planned placements do occur and that in such incidences introductions are made to the foster carer before the placement is made.

The 'skills to foster' training provided for prospective and new foster carers includes training sessions on bullying, management of challenging behaviour, child protection and safe caring. 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.

The agency's recruitment policies and procedures were in the process of being updated at the time of the inspection. The agency has recruited a full time Human Resources Manager who is coordinating the update of the systems in place with the support of two administrative staff. A separate office area was being established for the Human Resources team on the second floor of the building. The recruitment files for other areas of the country are also maintained at this office. It was noted on the files seen that there were no forms of identification on file and one new member of staff had not had a Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check completed by the agency before

commencing employment. There was a copy of the staff members CRB clearance from their previous employment on file.

All of the staff spoken to had a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities and had the skills and experience to carry out their work.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7, 13 and 31

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. One foster carer had provided Eid gift bags for the children placed with her and had made a particular effort to prepare food specific to the children's culture. One member of staff that was interviewed said that she was being supported to learn British Sign Language as one of the foster carers she supports is deaf and uses sign language. The agency was not providing a service to any severely disabled children that required aids and adaptations at the time of the inspection.

At the time of the inspection the agency did not have an education policy in place. The manager said that the agency was in the process of liaising with the National Teachers Advice Service to develop a policy and strategy for ensuring that children find and maintain suitable educational placements. The foster carers visited were supporting children with their nursery/school placements and older children had room to study.

The agency does not provide a short break service to birth parents but provides respite for foster carers who need a break.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10 and 11

Contact arrangements are made clear and foster carers are supported to ensure that appropriate contact is maintained between children and their families. The service consults children, young people and foster carers in various different ways to ensure that their views are heard.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangement 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. For example, a recent newsletter contained information on savings for children, promoting education, celebrations, reminders and information about the development of support groups for birth children of foster carers.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

14

The agency provides satisfactory support to foster carers or the children placed with them to enable them to adequately prepare for moving on to semi-independent or independent living.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has approximately forty-two semi-independent living placements for young people moving on from foster care. There is a manager responsible for this project and four outreach workers who provide support to the young people in these placements.

Foster carers are supported in preparing young people for moving on to semi-independent living and training is provided on 'Leaving Care'. The Foster Carers Portfolio also contains information on Moving on, Leaving Care, and Independent Living Skills.

The young person's social worker will be responsible for ensuring the Pathways Scheme is in place for young people who are preparing to leave foster care.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

1, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 26

The agency has an appropriate qualified and experienced management team who support and organise the staff team effectively. The agency provides good quality training for staff and foster carers and provides appropriate support and supervision to foster carers. Appropriate records are maintained for children placed. The agency has good quality accommodation suitable for its purpose.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has an appropriate Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide in place that are regularly reviewed and updated. Additional leaflet on various topics are added to the information provided dependent on the child's needs and understanding. For example, leaflets on sexuality, relationships and sexually transmitted diseases, bullying and children's rights are provided.

The management structure of the agency has changed since the last inspection. The manager has changed from one manager to another in the office and a new post of Senior Placement Officer has been developed to assist with the management and supervision of staff and also to provide structured career progression within the agency. One member of staff who has taken on this role was spoken to. The member of staff was clear about their roles and responsibilities. There are clear lines of accountability within the agency.

The manager said that carers are given a maximum caseload of twenty foster carers to supervise and that if they are carrying out assessments then their caseload will remain less than twenty to account for the extra work involved in the assessment process. All of the Social Work staff spoken to said that they received supervision at least monthly and said that they found the management team approachable and supportive. The agency has adequate administrative support and there is a duty team that deals directly with enquiries from prospective foster carers and requests for services.

All staff records viewed included staff contracts. The Human Resources Manager said that a new contract was in the process of being developed. She also said that a job description and person specification are sent out to and signed by new employees.

The agency has a high number of carers and children placed with them and the agency is continuing to expand across the UK. There is a clear and comprehensive assessment process in place that is carried out by qualified and experienced staff.

New foster carers are provided with a welcome pack, that includes general information about the agency, information about what is expected of the foster carer and what they can expect from the agency. They are also given a diary and leaflets with useful information.

Supervising Social Workers are available to foster carers on a twenty-four hour, seven day a week basis and they are also referred to the Emergency Duty team for their area if needed. The mobile contact numbers of managers are also provided to foster carers. The agency provides foster carer support groups in different regions and was in the process of developing support groups for the birth children of foster carers. Two of the members of staff

interviewed were involved in setting up a support group in North London and had sent out questionnaires asking children what they would like from the group.

Supervising Social Workers visit foster carers at least six weekly and all of the foster carers spoken to felt supported by their Social Worker. Records of these visits are maintained on the agency's computer system. However, there did not appear to be any set format for these records and some of the visit records viewed just stated a few words such as 'stable placement'.

Annual reviews are carried out for foster carers and detailed reports are prepared for these reviews including information from the foster carers and the children. It was noted that one foster carers annual review was six months overdue.

The agency has a Foster Carers Agreement that is signed by all new foster carers. This document did not contain all of the required information as outlined in Schedule 5 of the Foster Services Regulations.

The agency has an appropriate complaints procedure in place and adequate recording and monitoring systems in place to evaluate complaints and follow up any concerns. The agency has very few complaints.

Foster carers are provided with regular training. 'Skills to Foster' training is completed prior to approval and a regional training programme is in place. The administrative worker who is responsible for monitoring training explained the process for coordinating and monitoring training for foster carers. There is a very comprehensive system in place to ensure foster carers apply to attend courses and they are reminded of forthcoming courses by telephone and in writing. Recent training had included safe caring, child protection, managing behaviour, moving in/moving on, men in fostering, listening skills, health and safety at home and dealing with stress. Foster carers are expected to attend three training courses a year.

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, however, the foster carers spoken to were unclear about the expectations with regard to recording memories for the children when they move on. Any records kept by the foster carers were kept securely.

The premises used by the agency are accessible and well equipped. At the time of the inspection the agency was expanding the offices onto the second floor to provide more space and a large meeting room for panel meetings etc. There

are separate private office spaces for staff to meet or talk in confidence on the telephone and there is ample IT equipment in the office. All Social Workers have IT equipment installed at home to enable them to work at home and communicate with the office.

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 | 3 |

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? YES

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 Fostering Services Regulations 2002. | 01/04/06 |
| 2 | FS15 | 20(3)(d) | Recruitment records must include all of the required information as outlined in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 | 01/05/06 |
| 3 | FS21 | 29(2) | Annual reviews must take place for all foster carers | 01/05/06 |
| 4 | FS21 | 35(3)(b) | Satisfactory records must be maintained for all visits to foster carers. | 01/04/06 |
| 5 | FS22 | Schedule 5 | The Foster Carers Agreement must contain all of the information outlined in Schedule 5 of the Foster Services Regulations 2002. | 01/04/06 |

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 | FS7 | The children's guide should be provided in languages other than English to meet the diverse needs of the children the agency places. |
| 2 | FS24 | Foster Carers should be given clear guidance on recording memories for children to take with them when they move on. |

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