



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

**Catholic Children`s Society (Diocese of
Nottingham)**

**7 Colwick Road
West Bridgford
Nottingham
NG2 5FR**

Lead Inspector
Rosemary Chapman

Announced Inspection
14th-16th November 2005 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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 *Adoption*. 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	Catholic Children`s Society (Diocese of Nottingham)
Address	7 Colwick Road West Bridgford Nottingham NG2 5FR
Telephone number	0115 955 8811
Fax number	0115 955 8822
Email address	graham.pellew@ccsnotts.co.uk
Provider Web address	www.families-are-best.co.uk
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Catholic Children`s Society (Diocese of Nottingham)
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Graham Pellew
Type of registration	Voluntary Adoption Agency
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. The category of registration is:- Domestic Adoption Services only (DA)

Date of last inspection This is the first inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

Brief Description of the Service:

Families are Best is a well-established Voluntary Adoption Agency, having been registered since 1948 to provide adoption services for the Catholic Diocese of Nottingham.

It recruits, prepares, trains, assesses, approves and supports adoptive parents to provide secure and stable placements for looked after children in local authority care.

It provides counselling and support, including tracing and intermediary services, to adopted adults, birth families, adopters and young people whose lives have been affected by adoption.

It places and supports infants whose birth families request placements for adoption within a Roman Catholic family.

It has provided an independent service for birth families on behalf of a Local Authority and hopes to do this for another Local Authority in the future.

It provides training and consultancy services on a range of adoption related topics to Local Authorities and other Adoption Agencies.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was undertaken by 2 inspectors over a 3-day period. Prior to the inspection fieldwork taking place, a number of supporting documents were submitted to and read by the lead inspector. This included a comprehensive self assessment and policy and procedural information. The adoption panel was observed.

Questionnaires were received from 8 adopters and prospective adopters, 8 placing social workers, 4 placing councils and the legal, medical and education advisers.

During the fieldwork, interviews were conducted with 4 adoptive families, the chair of the adoption panel, the Director, the Deputy Director, the education advisor, the administrative team, the finance and administrative manager, the social work team, the Chair of the Trustees, the recruitment co-ordinator and the adoption support manager. Case files, personnel files and other documents were read.

The inspectors would like to thank the managers and staff for their cooperation and openness during the inspection and the hard work which they put in when organising both the pre-inspection material and the inspection programme.

What the service does well:

The agency impresses as very child focussed at every level, from the Trustees downwards. This has resulted into some very good practices being developed.

From the very start of the process, enquirers are given good information and have an in depth initial interview. The preparation groups are very detailed and thorough and run alongside the home study which is extremely beneficial for the applicants and useful for staff to pick up any issues whilst they are still fresh. Adopters commented that: "the preparation groups were very beneficial" and "really helpful" and "excellent". Placing social workers commented on "very good assessments", "detailed form F" and a placing council said: "adopters from the CCS always seem well prepared". Assessments are analytical and address safe caring throughout.

The assessment review conducted by the manager is very good practice, and serves a variety of purposes. It can help the manager address any issues

raised during the assessment and can also enable the applicants raise any issues with the manager.

The post adoption order visit is also very useful and very good practice as a means of clarifying what else needs to be done and picking up any issues.

The adoption panel is very thorough, well organised, the minutes are excellent and applicants are well prepared to attend. The agency decision maker makes the decision very quickly, taking account of all the information, and this is communicated quickly to the applicants.

The agency places a high priority on obtaining information about the birth family and the child and has prepared a useful booklet for local authorities outlining their expectations and the sort of information required. They will pursue this vigorously if the information is not forthcoming and may undertake the work themselves to ensure a good outcome for the child. The process of life appreciation days for children is also well established and an excellent way of obtaining first hand information for adopters about the child to be placed with them.

The accessibility of specialist advisers is good and the employment of an experienced, skilled and knowledgeable education adviser has particular benefits in supporting placements. Support from individual social workers is also good and the disruption rate for placements is low.

The case records and personnel files are very well constructed and well maintained. They are in good order, information is easy to find and there is clear evidence of regular monitoring.

The agency excels in its monitoring processes at all levels. The Board of Trustees has developed good systems to ensure the agency is run well. The Director and Manager have also developed good evaluation systems to ensure users of the service are asked their opinions at every stage. They are also keen to act on what they hear and one adopter said: "we do feel that the Catholic Children's Society are open and prepared to listen".

The staff group as a whole are very committed, skilful, knowledgeable and caring and a number of comments were received from adopters and placing social workers which confirms this. One adopter said they had an "experienced and sensitive social worker", another said "we cannot fault them in the slightest". A social worker from a local authority said "they were positive, child centred and a pleasure to work with". A placing council said "we always feel confident that adopters are well prepared, matched and supported when children are in placement".

The management of the agency is good – there is evidence that workers are well supported, have thorough inductions tailored to individual needs, regular supervision and access to relevant training. The administrative support is also

excellent and the whole staff group operate as a team to ensure the agency runs well.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection by the CSCI.

What they could do better:

There was very little that this inspection has highlighted that was in need of improvement. The assessments, although analytical, would benefit from addressing competencies. The inspectors had concerns about the practice of exploring links prior to adopters being approved and the Director has said this will now cease. In relation to the child protection allegation, although it is the responsibility of the local authority to investigate, the inspectors felt that this agency should have been more challenging of the local authority in their decision making process.

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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Being Healthy - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- Adopters are given information about matching (NMS 5)
- The functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10)
- The constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11)
- Adoption panels are timely (NMS 12)
- Adoption agency decision is made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13)
- The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15)
- Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19)
- The agency has a robust complaints procedure (NMS 24 Voluntary Adoption Agency only)

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

2,4,5,10,11,12,13,15,19,24

The agency has good systems in place to ensure that adopters are assessed and prepared well for the task of caring for a child placed with them and that safe placements are made.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has acknowledged that it needs to be more proactive in its recruitment of prospective adopters and has recently appointed an adoption recruitment co-ordinator to address this. Recruitment is now more targeted and the agency has seen an improvement in the number of enquiries it receives. The web site has also been developed and is kept up to date.

The agency has clear written statements about placing children in families who can meet their ethnic, cultural and religious needs and tries to recruit families who will consider more than one child so siblings can be kept together.

There is a thorough preparation, assessment and approval process. The agency runs 3 preparation groups a year and these consist of 7 full days, which run concurrently with the home study. This is very good practice as it enables good integration of learning and assessment and facilitates different styles of learning.

Adopters were generally positive about the preparation they received, some calling it "brilliant" but a small number felt some of the exercises were patronising. Prospective adopters are asked to evaluate each session and the trainers act on these evaluations.

The agency places a strong emphasis on safe caring and undertakes appropriate checks and references and health and safety issues are addressed. There is a module on the preparation course which looks at child protection and dealing with difficult behaviour and this is followed up with written information from the agency which gives clear guidelines and expectations. The information about an allegation concerning a child placed for adoption was inspected. The child's social worker from the local authority was aware of this but had not followed this up as thoroughly as the inspectors felt should have occurred. The manager was advised to seek written clarification about the placing authority's decision making process in relation to the allegation. The assessments inspected were sound and analytical but did not address competencies and some thought needs to be given as to how this can be done. There was evidence of very thorough visits to referees and the recording of these visits showed good analysis for the assessment and were comprehensive.

Another aspect of very good practice was the assessment review, which is always undertaken by the manager and worker and is used to explore any issues of concern or provide reassurance to the applicants that there are no difficulties in the assessment. This is also seen as an opportunity for the applicant to comment on the social worker and the process if they wish. It is suggested that it may be more useful for the manager to undertake this visit alone in order for applicants to be able to speak more freely if they wish. The recording of the assessment review is sent to the applicants and the reviews inspected indicated that it was a very thorough visit.

The agency has a handbook which is given to local authorities who match children with the adopters and this outlines the expectations in terms of information sharing and information expected for the child and adopters. There was evidence which showed that the agency pursue such information rigorously and are not prepared to compromise on this. The adoption register is used regularly and some of the adopters interviewed had been linked with their children through the register. Adopters spoken with said they had received enough information about the child and had the opportunity to speak to relevant professionals before agreeing to a match. Likewise, adopters prepared a family book to show the child prior to placement.

One issue which the inspectors were uneasy about was the tentative linking of children with adopters prior to approval at panel. This practice could lead to potential difficulties and was seen to compromise the process. Whilst it is accepted that prospective adopters are encouraged to look at magazines which

give details of children needing families, they should be discouraged from sending for further information before they have been to panel and been approved.

There is a comprehensive panel handbook which includes all the policies and procedures. The panel is appropriately constituted and contains a mix of people with different experiences and skills. There was evidence that new panel members observed a panel prior to becoming a voting member and that there was a planned induction. There was also evidence of at least one training session a year which includes agency staff.

The panel is well organised and held at reasonable intervals to prevent delay. Papers are sent out in advance to all panel members. The minutes are prepared quickly and were of a very high standard. The Agency decision maker sees all the papers and minutes before making her decision, which is done in a timely manner. Adopters are then informed of the decision in writing. It was suggested during the inspection that this letter include the date the decision was made and this was implemented before the end of the inspection.

Adopters may attend panel and have done so for some time. Applicants are well prepared for panel and there is a handbook of information and a video for them to view prior to attending. It is also made clear that they do not have to attend if they would prefer not to. Most adopters felt that panel were welcoming: "they were brilliant – lovely – they didn't duck out but were warm and welcoming". However, one family had a very unfortunate experience which had been raised with the agency at the time. Social work staff also commented that the panel was "very thorough".

The manager's file contained evidence of appropriate checks and references, as did the personnel files inspected on staff. There was evidence of thorough and appropriate recruitment and selection procedures. All staff are appropriately qualified, there is a good mix of experience within the team and they undertake regular training to keep them up to date with practice. The staff team impressed as very child focussed, committed and enthusiastic.

The agency has a complaints procedure with timescales and telephone numbers. It has also developed a complaints leaflet specifically for young children. This was very well done but would benefit from including the telephone numbers of the agency, the Children's Rights Officer and the Commission. As there have been no complaints in the last year, the record of complaints was not inspected.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)

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

6,18

The agency provides good support to adopters and has access to very good specialist advisers. This enables adoptive parents to cope with difficult and stressful situations and for families to remain intact.

EVIDENCE:

Social workers provide support to families on an individual basis both before placement and once a child has been placed in an adoptive family. This support is also available at any time after an adoption order has been made. One family interviewed said they receive “extremely good support” and described their social worker as “fantastic”. The majority of questionnaires received from adopters and placing social workers indicated that the agency is supportive – one adopter said “they supported us” and were “reliable”. A social worker commented on “excellent support”; another said the family were “well prepared and supported”. The agency has a low disruption rate which is further evidence that appropriate support is provided.

In recognition of the need to further develop post adoption support an adoption support manager has recently been appointed to develop and implement adoption support services. She has arranged an adopters focus group to look at what services are wanted and can be developed and is considering developing a children’s group. She is also looking at links with other agencies to develop joint services if this is appropriate.

Current support services include coffee mornings, an annual training event, a family fun day and a Christmas party. There is also a newsletter.

The agency carries out a post adoption visit within 3 months of an adoption order being made. This is extremely good practice and is useful in identifying any unfinished business such as information which is still outstanding or

contact issues, as well as reminding families that support services are available at any time.

The agency has its own medical, legal, educational and spiritual advisers who are accessible to adopters and staff in the agency and are well thought of. The education adviser has a wealth of personal and professional experience both in education and adoption and sees his role as “empowering parents to deal with schools” although he will deal directly with schools if this becomes necessary. He is preparing information to assist parents to choose schools and be aware of their rights and he also undertakes training. As research shows that many adoptive placements falter because of educational issues, his role is vital.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- The Adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)

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

7,8,9

The agency recognises the importance of the birth family in enabling a child to have a clear sense of identity and demonstrates a commitment to obtaining information and facilitating contact during childhood and beyond.

EVIDENCE:

The birth parents and families with whom this agency currently works are mainly those whose children were placed for adoption some years ago. Although the agency did have a service level agreement to provide the independent counselling for birth families on behalf of a local authority, this is currently in abeyance, pending negotiations with another local authority who may ask them to provide this service.

The agency has a clear view about the importance of the birth family for the child and this is expressed throughout its literature and in its work with local authorities when placing children. There are clear expectations that life story work, life story books, information about the family and child and later life letters are completed and given to the adoptive families at an early stage. The agency actively pursues this information and will undertake this work on behalf of the local authority at its request.

Although the agency offers a service to mothers of the Roman Catholic faith who wish to relinquish their babies for adoption and have them placed with Roman Catholic families, it has not placed such children for a number of years, therefore its practice in relation to this could not be inspected or commented on. It does however, continue to provide counselling to pregnant woman.

The agency has a letter box system in place for indirect contact arrangements for those children it placed some years ago. Arrangements for contact for

current children placed for adoption are maintained by their placing local authority.

The work which the agency undertakes with birth families and adopted adults includes counselling, tracing and intermediary work. This is a significant part of the work of the agency but is not addressed in any depth by these standards or this inspection.

Management

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- The agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
- The manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
- The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
- The agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
- The staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
- The agency has sufficient staff with the right skills / experience (NMS 21)
- The agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
- The agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
- Case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
- The agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
- The agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
- The agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
- The adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30, Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)

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

1,3,14,16,17,20,21,22,23,25,26, 27,28,29,30,31

The agency is well managed at all levels and the ethos of the leadership promotes good, child focussed practice and good outcomes for children.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a clear statement of purpose which is accessible to staff, adopters and anyone involved with the agency. Staff interviewed confirmed they had contributed to its development.

The written information which the agency provides to adopters is of a very good standard. It gives clear and unambiguous information about the process and the eligibility criteria and the types of children who need adoptive families. There are a number of information packs given to applicants/prospective adopters at different stages in the process, recognising that there is a great deal of information to assimilate and that some aspects become more relevant at different times.

The responsible individual and registered manager are very knowledgeable, skilled, experienced and well qualified in terms of child care, adoption and management. The Board of Trustees has a number of people with sound financial and legal backgrounds.

The manager has a detailed written job description and there are clear levels of accountability, delegation and responsibility.

Staff interviewed felt that the agency was managed well at all levels and said that communication was good with mechanisms in place to ensure they know what is going on and to influence this. This includes regular staff meetings, supervision and email. When speaking about the standard of management and leadership staff said: "they challenge us but support us and management is always child focussed". They also said "there is always space to be creative – there is something about the ethos of the place which allows this to develop".

Staff receive regular supervision and commented that this was very useful. New members of staff receive supervision on a fortnightly basis, whilst other staff receive it either 4 or 6 weekly, depending on whether they are full or part time. There was evidence of the monitoring of work undertaken through supervision notes on the files inspected and regular auditing of their work. Staff are also appraised on an annual basis.

Staff felt there was ready access to relevant training, both in-house and external and there was evidence that staff had undertaken a significant amount of training. A very high percentage of staff have obtained the post qualification in child care (70%). As an agency, staff are also available to provide training and consultancy for other agencies.

The agency has sufficient office equipment and administrative support. Social work staff commented that the administrative staff are "absolutely excellent" and they were always willing to help. The administrative staff felt well supported and part of the team and were aware of the important impact their role has in the work of the agency. There is always someone undertaking reception duties and answering the telephone and there is a social worker on duty five days a week, which ensures that any enquiries are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

There was no evidence of delay in assessing adopters and this would suggest that there are sufficient staff, although the agency also has access to a small number of sessional staff who are used for particular purposes.

Staff were very positive about the Catholic Children's Society as an employer and some staff have been employed there for many years; others have made an active choice to seek employment there based on their experiences of the agency when working elsewhere or by reputation. There were good examples of how the agency had responded to individual needs and circumstances, providing an appropriate balance of information and support without pressure. Likewise new staff spoke very positively about their induction which took account of their skills, experience and knowledge and was very structured and supportive.

The systems for monitoring and controlling the work of the agency are excellent. The Board of Trustees provides a challenging yet supportive body of people, who are knowledgeable and involved in the work of the agency. There are regular meetings between the Chair of Trustees and the Director of the agency, quarterly meetings of the 2 committees (Financial and General Purposes and Professional Issues) and quarterly meetings of the whole Board of Trustees. Written reports and verbal updates are provided for all these meetings.

The agency has other monitoring and evaluation methods in place to ensure that people who use the service have a voice and their opinions are sought. All people who use the service are sent evaluation questionnaires at every stage of the process, including post adoption order, and these are used to improve practice. This also includes evaluation of recruitment procedures for staff, staff appraisal and appraisals of panel members.

The case records inspected were of a very high quality – they were well organised, well ordered and contained clear evidence of audit and review by management. Case notes were typed, signed and dated and clearly differentiated between fact and opinion. They were stored appropriately and confidentiality was given a high priority. There are clear written procedures in place for accessing records by other agencies.

The files on personnel and panel members were also of a high quality, were well structured, well organised and contained all the information necessary.

The agency is located in good premises, accessible and identifiable and with easy access to public transport. Both the premises and the IT systems are secure, the latter having regular back up and access to specialist advice when necessary. The agency has a good disaster recovery plan.

The agency has a detailed business plan and good accounting procedures. The finances are regularly monitored so that any issues can be acted upon quickly. The agency has sufficient reserves to enable the business to carry on for at

least 2 years if there was a financial crisis. The Finance and General Purposes committee receive quarterly reports on the financial state of the agency, and this is considered on an annual basis by the whole Board of Trustees.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 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>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
8	3
9	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	3
4	3
5	3
10	3
11	3
12	3
13	3
15	3
19	3
24	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
6	3
18	4

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
3	4
14	3
16	3
17	4
20	3
21	3
22	3
23	3
25	4
26	3
27	3
28	4
29	3
30	3
31	3

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Voluntary Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2003 or Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	*RCN	The manager should ensure that more written information is obtained in relation to the child protection investigation discussed.
2	AD4	The manager should consider ways of making the assessments more competency based.
3	AD5	The agency should cease the practice of pursuing tentative links prior to adopters being approved.
4	AD24	The complaints leaflet designed for children should contain the same telephone numbers as the main complaints procedure.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

North West Regional Office

11th Floor

West Point

501 Chester Road

Old Trafford

M16 9HU

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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