



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

Medway Fostering Service

Medway Council

Compass Centre

Pembroke Gate, Dock Road

Chatham

Kent

ME4 4YH

29th November 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

Medway Fostering Service

Address

Medway Council, Compass Centre, Pembroke Gate, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4YH

Local Authority Manager

Mr Clive Eggleton

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01634 331227

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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?

Date of last inspection

23/05/03

Date of Inspection Visit		29th November 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Alex Turner	099984
Name of Inspector	2	Felicity Reeves	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr. Clive Eggleton	

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

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 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 CSCI in respect of Medway 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 CSCI 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.

Medway Council Fostering Team coordinates and manages the delivery of foster care services provided by the authority. The fostering service provides short term, long term, permanent and emergency placements as needs require. Placements for children and young people with disabilities and / or special needs, babies, young children, mother and babies, teenagers and adolescents and pre adoption placements have been made. The fostering team also arrange and provide respite care, short term breaks and arrange day care in order to support families in the community as well as foster care placements. Within the team there is a dedicated placement support service staffed by three social workers. Their functions include support to carers with children and / or young people with complex and challenging behaviour and to provide day care for children and young people who are not attending school. Finally there is a link scheme that uses foster carers approved specifically for the task of providing support to families who have a child with a disability.

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.)

The inspection was announced and conducted over five consecutive days with additional visits to observe the fostering panel and to provide preliminary feedback of inspection findings. The two recommendations from the last inspection report concerning out of hours support and the number of staff working in the fostering team remain outstanding. A total of thirty out of thirty-two standards have been assessed (standards relating to the financial management of the fostering service were not inspected). Fifteen standards have been rated as met, thirteen standards have been rated as almost met, a major shortfall was identified in one standard, and one has been rated with standard exceeded. Throughout the inspection process the social work, administrative and management staff of the fostering service were cooperative, open and receptive to the inspection process. Eight foster homes were visited; the children, young people and foster carers who took part in the inspection are thanked for the valuable contribution they made. Forty-six children and forty-eight foster carers completed preinspection questionnaires again contributing significantly to the inspection process.

Statement of Purpose - Standard 1

Standard nearly met.

The Statement of Purpose reflected the operation of the fostering service at the time of this inspection. The Childrens Guide should be reviewed and amended prior to printing further copies, taking into account a requirement and recommendation made in this report.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service - Standards 2 & 3

Both standards were met.

The professional qualifications, experience and achievements of the manager and senior staff relate to their operational functions and support their fitness to carry on a fostering service.

Management of the fostering service - Standards 4 & 5

Both standards were met.

The fostering service has been managed diligently by people who are competent and committed to do so. The manager was aware of and working on areas where standards in practice could and should be raised.

Securing and promoting welfare Standards 6 to 14

Six standards were met / three standards were nearly met

The agency operates in a manner that protects and promotes childrens & young peoples welfare. Medway Council have demonstrated a commitment to ensuring looked after children access suitable educational facilities. Recommendations made relate to monitoring standards of accommodation provided, refining safe care policies and guidelines with foster carers on an individual basis, and ensuring foster carers are trained in first aid.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers - Standards 15 to 23

Two standards were met / Seven standards were nearly met

Staff and foster carers were well managed. Foster carers were on the whole positive about the support provided by the fostering service. The staff team were complimentary of employment practices and expressed that they felt supported by the fostering service and their colleagues. Recruitment procedures needed to be refined and be brought in line with regulatory requirements. A recommendation has been made regarding updating foster carers assessments. Staff numbers and out of hours support should be reviewed. Written guidance to and agreements with foster carers should be reviewed and updated. The fostering services has demonstrated commitment to ensuring staff and carers have opportunities for training and professional development though recommendations have been made with regard to linking training provision with identified needs and shortfalls.

Records - Standards 24 & 25

One of the standards was met / One standard had major shortfalls.

The childrens and young people's social work team maintained childrens files. Information was being shared with and made available to the fostering team. Foster carers files would benefit from audit and consistent standards being applied. Shortfalls were identified in relation to specific information required by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 not having been obtained and / or maintained as required.

Fitness of premises for use as fostering service - Standard 26

The standard was nearly met.

Whilst the premises meet much of the criteria of the standard, the fostering service is outgrowing the accommodation and the office resources at its disposal.

Financial requirements - Standards 27 to 29

Two of the standards were not assessed. One standard was met.

The agencies financial systems and procedures were not inspected. Foster carers allowances have in the main been paid promptly.

Fostering panels - Standard 30

The standard was nearly met.

The fostering panel has been constituted in line with the standard and regulatory requirements. The manner in which foster carers approval status has been changed needs to be reviewed.

Short-term breaks - Standard 31

The standard was exceeded.

The arrangements for providing respite care and short term breaks stood out as an area of good practice.

Family and friends as carers - Standard 32

The standard was met.

The fostering service and the adoption team have implemented a collaborative approach with good effect in developing this valuable service.

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:

NO

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:

Please note - Section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000 has been repealed. A notice to the director of Medway Councils Health and Community Services has been made in accordance with section 81(4) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

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	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

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 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	3(3)(c)	FS1	The Fostering Service Provider shall ensure that future editions of the childrens guide include the name of the Commission for Social Care Inspection together with the address of the local office as well as the phone number.	As and when further copies are printed.
2	20(3)(d)	FS15	The Fostering Service Provider shall not employ a person (for a definition of employing a person please refer to regulation 2 (3) of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 (FSR2k2)) to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the matters set out in paragraphs 1 to 6 of Schedule 1 (FSR2k2).	31/01/05
3	29(2)	FS17	The Fostering Service Provider shall ensure a review of the approval of each foster carer takes place whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.	31/01/05
4	17(1)	FS18FS19	The Fostering Service Provider shall provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.	01/05/05

5	28(5)(b)	FS22	The Fostering Service Provider shall make arrangements to review or issue individual Foster Care Agreements and where applicable update these in line with regulations.	31/01/05
6	30, 31 & 32	FS25	The Fostering Service Provider shall ensure that the records required by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 are kept and maintained by the fostering service in accordance with the and include the detail specified in the regulations.	01/04/05
7	28(5)(b)	FS25	The Fostering Service Manager shall ensure that any changes in foster carer's approval status are reflected in the foster carers agreement.	31/01/05

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 manager of the fostering service should take into account the needs of different groups of children and young people placed by the fostering service and if found to be necessary ensure the children's guide is produced in different formats to meet these needs.
2	FS1	The Fostering Service Manager should ensure the Statement of Purpose includes details regarding the process of foster carers reviews.
3	FS5	The Fostering Service Provider should ensure carers, managers and staff have explicitly been made aware of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.
4	FS6	The Fostering Service Manager should ensure the standard of accommodation (especially children / young people's bedrooms) provided by foster carers is regularly reviewed and that any such review takes into account the placements that are being made / have been made.

5	FS9	The Fostering Service Manager should make arrangements to review foster carers safe caring policies and provide coaching where they are found to be ambiguous or lack detail. The Fostering Service Manager should also ensure the policies are cleared with placing social workers and are explained clearly and appropriately to the child or young person being placed.
6	FS12	The Fostering Service Manager should ensure all foster carers attain a certificate in first aid and to attend updates at the frequency indicated by the awarding body.
7	FS17*RCN	The Fostering Service Manager should consider updating assessments of foster carers when there have been significant changes in the composition of the household or in instances where the original assessment is more than three years old.
8	FS17	The Fostering Service Provider should undertake a review of staff provision and ensure that there is, having regard to the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it; and the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents, a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for purposes of the fostering service.
9	FS18	The Fostering Service Provider should move forward on the review of out of hours support with a view to achieving best practice.
10	FS18	The Fostering Service Manager should consolidate the insights gained as a result of reviewing systems relating to foster carers supervision and support, and aim to achieve a consistent approach to practice in this area.
11	FS18	The Fostering Service Manager should move forward on the plans to review and update the foster carers handbook.
12	FS19	The Fostering Service Manager should ensure that the annual reviews address foster carers training needs in a robust manner and reflect placements being made and identified gaps in the foster carers knowledge.
13	FS22	The Fostering Service Manager should make arrangements to issue (or if applicable reissue) the Foster Care Agreement at each formal review that is undertaken regarding individual foster carers suitability to foster, and their approval status; update it where necessary and for each party to sign their agreement in the first instance and / or subsequently where changes to the foster carers approval status have been made.
14	FS25	The Fostering Service Manager should make arrangements to monitor and review the quality and standard of record keeping within the fostering service to ensure regulatory requirements are met and best practice is promoted and maintained.

15	FS30	The Fostering Service Manager should ensure information is provided to the panel with regard to foster carers annual reviews to the extent that will enable the panel to gain an overview of the of the performance and suitability of foster carers.
16	FS30*RCN	The Fostering Service Manager should ensure that where the fostering panel considers proposed changes in a foster carers approval status the panel has adequate information on which to base it's recommendations.

* 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	12
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
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	YES
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	NO
Date of Inspection	29/11/04
Time of Inspection	0930
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	40
Medway Fostering Service	

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI 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) |
| 1 - Standard Not Met | (Major Shortfalls) |

"0" 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.

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 has been published and distributed. The document clearly describes the aims, objectives, facilities and services provided. Subsequent revisions of the Statement of Purpose should include details regarding the process of foster carers reviews. A Childrens Guide has also been produced and distributed. The guide has recently been revised and updated. Future editions of the guide should contain the name of the Commission for Social Care Inspection together with the address of the local office as well as the phone number. The manager of the fostering service should also take into account the needs of different groups of children and young people placed by the fostering service and if found to be necessary ensure the guide is produced in different formats to meet these needs.

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?	3
The manager of the fostering service is suitably qualified and experienced to do so. The overall findings of this inspection indicate the manager has exercised effective leadership of the staff and operation of the service.		

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?	3
There is no question regarding the manager's suitability to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children however the recruitment procedures do need to be refined with reference to Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 (see standard 15 requirement no. 1).		

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?

3

The manager has established and / or utilises existing systems to monitor the functions and operation of the fostering service. Examples of such include maintaining an overview of supervising social workers contacts with foster carers and the outcomes of statutory reviews, both of which enabling ongoing monitoring of compliance with placement agreements and care plans. The manager and staff of the service were all clear about their own and each other roles. Lines of accountability were well defined. The administrative team had a good grasp of the mechanics of financial procedures they discharged in the course of their day-to-day duties. It was not clear in documentation provided for inspection if carers, managers and staff have been explicitly made aware of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest. The boxes below have not been completed, as there is not a statutory requirement for Local Authority Fostering Services to notify the Commission for Social Care Inspection of the events listed below.

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

NA

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The overall findings of this inspection indicate the day-to-day operation of the fostering service is managed effectively. The manager has a job description. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, are clearly defined. There is a suitably qualified and designated person to deputise for the manager in their absence.

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
<p>Written and verbal feedback provided by children and young people has in the main been positive about their experience of life in a foster home. Eight foster homes were visited during this inspection. Of the eight, in six homes there children / young people who were sharing bedrooms. The age difference of children sharing rooms in one case spanned five years. The manager of the fostering service agreed to look into the number and circumstances of children sharing rooms as it felt this figure may be disproportionate of the numbers sharing overall. The manager asserted that in every case where children were sharing consultation had taken place and an agreement had been reached with the relevant parties. The standard of accommodation varied. On the whole communal areas of the homes visited were warm and welcoming though the standard of childrens / young peoples bedrooms varied. Some had clearly been decorated and furnished in line with children young peoples individual tastes and preferences whereas in other this did not appear to have been the case. Annual review notes and contact records sampled indicate that more attention could be made to the standard of accommodation especially in childrens / young peoples rooms. There were no obvious health and safety hazards in any of the homes visited.</p>		

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
<p>The fostering team have adopted a collaborative approach and utilise the wider resources of Medway Council in terms of valuing diversity and promoting equality. For example effective links have been established with the team that provides and coordinates services for physically disabled children and young people. Staff in the respite fostering team have a wealth of experience in providing services for disabled children and have articulated a strong commitment to promoting and meeting the needs of disabled children in foster care. There has been input from other teams to help address and meet identity and religious needs for children and young people including those from ethnic minorities. The matching process has taken into account factors relating to diversity and special needs arising.</p>		

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
Discussions with staff and carers indicated that matches are achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and his or her family and potential carers, their families and other children in placement. Observation of the referrals meeting when all fostering social workers meet to discuss placements and an additional meeting where individual cases are highlighted and discussed with members of the senior management team, evidenced that matching is a dynamic process. Detailed referral forms were being used however these were not evident in all files sampled. Foster placement agreements did not though should contain specific reference to elements of matching that were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement.		

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?	2
Included in the training programme for foster carers are sessions covering caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour and recognising signs of abuse. Foster carers have developed safe caring policies that are particular to their own circumstances. The quality of the policies varied. The recommendation was made to review foster carers safe caring policies and provide coaching where they were found to be ambiguous or lacked detail. The recommendation was also made to ensure the guidelines are cleared with the placing social worker and are explained clearly and appropriately to the child or young person being placed. Foster carers have explicitly been made aware that corporal punishment is not allowed. Allegations against foster carers have been treated seriously and investigated independently. Details of allegations, investigations and outcomes are maintained and scrutinised in the ongoing managerial monitoring of the service. There are clear written procedures for foster carers to follow in the event of a child or young person going missing. The procedures have been written in collaboration with the local police authority.		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

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?**

3

Records indicated that contact arrangements had been included in placement agreements, discussed in statutory reviews and verified in ongoing correspondence. Foster carers were aware of the duty to support children and young people in maintaining and developing family contacts and friendships. Foster carers have reported various ways in which they have supported children and young people in this area including supervising contact visits help with transport and escorting children and young people to contact venues and supporting them to have contact via emails, the telephone and letter writing. Outcomes and observations made following contact visits have been recorded and relayed back to the fostering service and the placing social worker.

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?**

3

Twenty one per cent of children and young people who were sent a pre inspection questionnaire by the Commission for Social Care Inspection returned one that had been completed. Very near one hundred percent replied that either often or sometimes they were asked by their foster carers for their opinions and views on things that mattered to them. Some of the examples given of things that had changed as a result of them expressing an opinion included having a light on or off at night, contact arrangements, holiday destinations, meals provided and how bedrooms were decorated. Eighty four percent of children and young people who returned the questionnaire indicated that they knew how to make a complaint.

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?**

2

The fostering service has a good deal of local knowledge with regard to the health services and facilities in the areas it operates. Health care needs are taken into account in the matching process. The fostering service has established good links with other teams within Medway Council, which have served to ensure health care needs, are identified, planned for and met. Foster carers have indicated that on the whole information about the health status of a child or young person placed with them has been provided at the referral stage, point of placement or soon after. Foster carers were clear about their role in promoting children and young peoples health and in some cases where it was required, were making a significant contribution to do so. First aid training is included in the training provided to foster carers however not all have attended. The recommendation is made to ensure all foster carers attain a certificate in first aid and to attend updates at the frequency indicated by the awarding body.

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 have demonstrated awareness of their duty to promote children and young peoples educational attainment. Young people have confirmed support has been forthcoming in this area such as help with homework, attending after school activities, and enabling regular attendance. Medway Councils have designated personnel charged with ensuring looked after children have up to date and good quality personal education plans. Working links have been established between the council's social services and education departments. The fostering service manager confirmed the childrens social work team maintains information systems regarding educational attainment and numbers excluded from school of children and young people in foster care. The fostering team have arranged alternative day care provision for children and young people who are not in school.

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

Through training, supervision and written guidance foster carers are made aware of and supported to meet the requirements of what is expected of them in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. Medway Council have a designated team (the sixteen plus team) that works with young people from the age of fifteen specifically to coordinate and support efforts to help prepare them for independence. A plan is developed for young people at the age of sixteen that sets out a 'pathway' to gaining independence and leaving care. Foster carers with young people at this stage have confirmed they have contributed to these processes with the support of the fostering team. The fostering services manager has described work taking place with the sixteen plus team to design and run joint independence training for foster carers.

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?

2

Medway Council have established recruitment and selection procedures applicable to staff working in the fostering service. Recruitment records sampled indicated that the procedures have been followed though require review with reference to schedule one of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002; a requirement to do so has been made. Records indicate staff working in the fostering service are suitably qualified and experienced to fulfil the duties assigned to them. The fostering service provides practice placements to social work students and has other unqualified staff undertaking support work; in respect to these personnel there are systems in place to ensure they are properly supervised in their work.

Total number of staff of the agency:

16.07

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

The management structure is straightforward. Personnel spoken to were clear about lines of accountability. Work delegated to staff was in line with their respective roles and responsibilities. The manager of the fostering service has established systems to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads though this has not resulted in the suitability of all foster cares being formally reviewed at least once every twelve months. A requirement is made to do so. Assessments of foster carers circumstances have not been updated outside of the annual review process. There were cases where it was considered by the inspectors where it would be good practice to do so for, example when there had been significant changes in the composition of the household or in instances where the original assessment was more than three years old. Records indicated and staff confirmed that professional supervision and consultation are provided for social work staff. The training provision for foster carers has been reviewed. Ongoing training is arranged for carers and staff. Training portfolios are under development. Office back up and administrative systems were efficient though working to capacity. The close physical proximity of the fostering team and the children and young people's social work team has promoted links between the two though the impact on practice depended very much on the approach of individual workers.

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?****2**

There is well-qualified and experienced staff working for the fostering service. The average caseload size of social workers in the fostering team is double what the inspectors have found is typical in Independent Fostering Agencies. The dedication and commitment of staff working in the fostering service was clear. The good level of staff retention is indicative of a supportive working environment and solid teamwork. There was not however any slack to take up. For example in the case of sickness or absence there is an immediate knock on effect to the workload of other members of the team. The fact that annual reviews were not being completed within the required timescale may be one indicator of this. Foster Carers are being recruited, assessed and approved in line with the standards however assessments of foster carers circumstances have routinely not been updated outside of the annual review process. There were cases where it was considered by the inspectors where it would be good practice to do so for example when there had been significant changes in the composition of the household or in instances where the original assessment was more than three years old. Again it is felt that this is indicative of the workload and as a consequence has not been made a priority.

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**

Feedback from both staff and carers indicate there are sound employment practices. The out of hour's management and support was however widely criticised; the vast majority of carers who returned a preinspection questionnaire noted shortfalls with this service. The fostering service manager reported that a proposal has been made with regard to improving the out of hour's service though nothing has yet come to fruition. The recommendation is made to move forward on the review of out of hours support with a view to achieving best practice. Systems for carer supervision and support have been under review. The inspectors were of the opinion that the review has shown how practice can be improved and that the insights gained should now be consolidated and a consistent approach adopted in this area. A Fosters Carers Handbook has been published and has grown over the years with the addition of other published documents relating to good practice in foster care. Though much of the information is relevant there is some that is out of date and lots which is not especially specific to foster carers working for Medway. The manager spoke about plans to review and update this material and the recommendation is made to do so.

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
<p>Induction and training needs of staff working in the fostering service have been taken into account and planned for. The separate elements of training, supervision and appraisal were consistent with each other. Annual reviews of foster carers sampled often failed to address training needs in a robust manner and without explicitly linking into placements made and any identified gaps in foster carers knowledge. Training provision for foster carers has though been subject to review and the manager reported that the plans made to ensure foster carers benefit from well thought out training programmes are soon to come on line.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Staff spoken to knew whom they were accountable to. They were complimentary about the support they received; this included formal systems of support via line management and supervision and more informal support for instance ad hoc advice and consultancy from their peers and senior colleagues. Job descriptions have been developed detailing what is expected in terms of the capacity in which staff are employed. All staff members receive management supervision; a record is kept of the content of the supervision and of progress made. A system of staff appraisal is in operation. Regular staff meetings are held; it was confirmed that each member of staff has the opportunity to attend and contribute to these meetings.</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>Strategies have been developed for working with and supporting foster carers and these have been evidenced in practice. Elements of the way in which foster carers are supervised have been reviewed (see text to standard 18). Foster carers that provided written feedback (x47) and verbal feedback (x12) in the main held positive regard with respect to the support they were provided by the fostering service. The role of the supervising social workers was clearly articulated by foster carers and the workers themselves. Annual review reports are prepared and made available to the fostering panel. Feedback from the childrens and young peoples social work team indicate effective communication has been established between the fostering service and placing social workers.</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?**

2

The fostering service and foster carers are obliged to enter into an agreement that sets out what is expected from the fostering service, the foster carers and placing authorities. Such an agreement (The Foster Care Agreement) had not been entered into by the fostering service with all the carers it had approved. A requirement and recommendation has been made in relation to this shortfall. Foster carers are provided with a handbook and other documents relating to practice as a foster carer. Those visited said they had rarely referred to this written information as support and information was always available from their supervising social worker. Additional comments have been made about the written information provided to foster carers in the text to standard eighteen of this report. Records demonstrate that supervising social workers meet regularly with foster carers and that they also have telephone contact with them as and when required. Practical support provided includes membership to the local foster care association, respite care where appropriate, prompt payment of the fostering allowance and group membership of a recognised national fostering body. Information about how to make a complaint or representation has been widely distributed. Records demonstrate that complaints or allegations made have been dealt with seriously and that outcomes reached have taken into account information that has been available.

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?**

2

Pre-approval and induction training for each carer has been organised. Training foster carers had attended was referred to in their reviews though did not clearly link to any identified shortfalls or developmental aspirations (see text and recommendation made under standard nineteen). There was documentation to demonstrate that individual and collective training needs analysis had taken place and was now informing the development of the foster carers training programme. The foster service has access to premises that provide a suitable training venue. Examples of topics covered in the last twelve months include direct work with adolescents, working with ten to twelve year olds, caring for sexually abused children, drug and alcohol misuse and sessions on attachment. Foster carers have been supported to attain relevant National Vocational Qualifications. The fostering service has systems in place to evaluate training provision.

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?	3
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The fostering service utilises the case records maintained by the children and young persons social work team. Foster carers have confirmed verbally and in writing that the fostering service makes efforts to ensure they know why a child or young person is in foster care and that they understand the basis for the current placement, its intended duration and purpose, and details of the child's legal status. Foster carers have indicated the quality of this information has sometimes been questionable though have also indicated that they did not see this primarily as a shortfall of the fostering service. Foster carers have expressed a pragmatic understanding that due to individual circumstances and development of children and young people a degree of flexibility is required in terms of plans and arrangements made. Foster carers mentioned various ways in which they have supported children and young people to reflect on and understand her/his history including the use of photographs, chronologies, keepsakes and memory boxes.

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?	1
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The fostering service manager has acknowledged there are shortfalls in the detail and format of records kept. The childrens register and the foster carers register needed developing and records required in the instance where emergency or immediate placements had been made were lacking. The fostering service maintains records relating to foster carers in terms of their assessment, approval, subsequent reviews, support and supervision. The quality of record keeping could be improved in terms of the order and tidiness of files. There were also instances where entries had not been signed and / or dated. Written reports were in some cases hard to follow in that chronology of events and the names of people involved were not always clear. There is a system for keeping records about allegations and complaints and for handling these confidentially and securely. Records of complaints and allegations are recorded including details of the investigation, conclusion reached and action taken. Separate records are also kept which bring together data on allegations and on complaints.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			186
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			192
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			96
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			21
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			15
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	175.14	Maximum £	295.40

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?

2

The premises used as offices by the fostering service are in a building offering security and general facilities appropriate for the purpose. The office is accessible to staff and others with a legitimate interest during normal office hours and if required outside of these times for example to allow staff to continue working after 5 pm. Information and communication systems were in place though there it was reported that there were not enough desks and computer terminals to go round. The office space was cramped with what looked like every available surface and floor space being used to it's limit. There were facilities for the secure retention of records and appropriate measures to safeguard information systems.

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?
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	9
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This standard was not inspected.

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?
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	9
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This standard was not inspected.

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

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Foster carers have reported that payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. There was however an anomaly to this in that some foster carers have reported payments for providing respite care have at times been slow in being paid. This was discussed with the manager who gave the assurance that the problems had been identified and steps taken to rectify the problem.

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?

2

An observation of the fostering panel in operation and a discussion with the foster panel chair was included in the process of this inspection. Written procedures covered decision-making when all members of the panel are not in agreement. Regarding checks on the suitability of panel members please refer to the text in Standard 15 (requirement no. 2) The panel has access to medical expertise. The inspector was informed that the panel provides a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process and was satisfied that this was the case. The panel receive management information about the outcomes of foster carer's annual reviews. The manner in which this is approached should be reviewed with the aim of enabling more rigorous monitoring by the panel of the performance and suitability of foster carers. Although some information is provided to panel members to enable monitoring of the range and type of carers available to the authority in comparison with the needs of children, this is an area that would benefit from further development. The manner in which changes in carer's approval status have been managed must be revised. It is acknowledged there is a strong element of good practice demonstrated in that the panel has approved changes. Requests for changes in approval status should though be informed by a report from the supervising social worker of the foster carers concerned. Changes in approval status must be reflected in the foster carers agreement as such and not as temporary exemptions to their approval status.

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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	4
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The fostering service has a dedicated team within the team to coordinate and manage respite placements, which includes short-term breaks where birth parents remain the main carers for a child or young person. There are two full time well qualified and experienced social work staff and a part time member of staff in the team. Energy, innovation and a needs led approach were very much to the fore in the way in which the team is operating and developing services. The scope of the work undertaken which includes recruiting, assessing, managing and supervising respite carers, matching placements with carers, providing training, ongoing support, coordinating school runs and day care arrangements is wide and varied; it was clear to the inspectors it is a much needed service and one that could easily put to good use additional staff resources. It was reported that this team is also taking a lead in developing plans for the creation of a respite centre for children with disabilities. Taking into account all of the above the inspectors commend the work of the respite team and the fostering service for enabling such a resource to grow and develop from within it.

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?	3
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Evidence obtained from discussions with staff, relevant documentation, and from observation of the panel indicated that the local authority recognises and encourages the particular contribution that can be made by family and friends as carers. A Relatives and Friends Service has been established. Assessments of families wishing to look after a child of the family are undertaken which are sensitive to pre-existing relationships. A carers support group meets bi-monthly. Specific individual training is provided. A handbook is being prepared.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Not applicable

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

Lead Inspector **Alex Turner** **Signature** 

Second Inspector **Felicity Reeves** **Signature** _____

Regulation Manager **Alison Spreadbridge** **Signature** _____

Date _____

D.1 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 29 November 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

The Medway Fostering Service was subjected to a very thorough and fair inspection. The team benefited from on-going verbal feedback, guidance and explanation during the process that was then confirmed in the formal written report.

The attached action plan highlights the component part of the Inspection Report requirements and recommendations together with the actions/progress/plans. Of the Regulation and Standard items identified for change, to date, 62% have been completed and introduced within the service, 33% have been progressed to an advanced position of implementation or planning, with the remaining 5% subject to research and submission to senior managers for consideration.

The Fostering Team will continue with this commitment and seek to work closely with CSCI in order to fully comply with the Regulations and Minimum Standards to the purpose of maintaining an improving Service for children and families in Medway.

Clive Eggleton
Fostering Manager
9th February 2005

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

NO

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 14 February 2005, 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

NO

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI 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 Clive Eggleton of Medway Homefinders 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 Clive Eggleton
Signature _____
Designation Fostering Services Manager
Date 14 March 05

Or

D.3.2 I Clive Eggleton of Medway Homefinders 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:

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.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
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