



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Wakefield MDC - Family Placement Team

6 Springfield Grange
Flanshaw Lane
Wakefield
West Yorkshire
WF2 9QP

26th February 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

Wakefield MDC - Family Placement Team

Address

6 Springfield Grange, Flanshaw Lane, Wakefield, West
Yorkshire, WF2 9QP

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

01924 302167

Address

6 Springfield Grange, Flanshaw Lane, Wakefield, West
Yorkshire, WF2 9QP

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Kitty Ferris

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Sue Cotton (acting)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

03/03/03

Date of Inspection Visit		26 th February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		08:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Stella Henderson	110610
Name of Inspector	2	-	
Name of Inspector	3	-	
Name of Inspector	4	-	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		-	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		-	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Sue Cotton	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

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Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

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Part D: Provider's Response

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D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of Wakefield MDC - Family Placement Team. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council Fostering Service is committed to providing high quality foster placements for children and young people who are unable to live within their birth families. It aims to give safe, secure and caring environments by placing them with foster carers who are able to understand a child's needs, and have the ability to work with a wide range of people. The service promotes a range of values and standards reflected in the UN Convention and the Rights of the Child, child care legislation and National Minimum Standards.

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.)

This was a positive inspection, with the majority of requirements from the last inspection being met. The inspector found a service that was functioning well following organisational change, although some systems and procedures still require time to become embedded in practice. There was a sense that, now change has occurred, staff are keen to move on and they have clearly been motivated by Sue Cotton, who has worked closely with the team since the departure of the acting manager. The inspector hopes that the new manager will continue this momentum.

The inspector found many examples of good practice, and would like to commend the service on its very evident child-centred approach. This was reflected in comments from returned questionnaires, social work files, in the undertaking of life story work, in the way that foster carers spoken to described their work, and in observations of children and young people, who were generally healthy, happy, felt involved and who were doing well in school.

The inspector tracked the cases of four foster carers, and ten looked after children. Four prospective foster carer files were looked at, as well as a selection of files of those children placed with private fostering agencies.

Over 300 questionnaires were sent out; 36 were returned from foster carers, 27 from looked after children, and 30 from placing officers. Eight young people joined a consultation group as part of the inspection. Comments were largely positive, with the support of family placement workers being particularly appreciated. The main concerns of foster carers -- were the level of payment and difficulties in getting hold of social workers, although this comment was often qualified with the acknowledgement of the shortage of social workers. Children and young people who returned their questionnaires were also largely positive in their responses; one of their main complaints was not being allowed to stay overnight at friends at short notice.

The most serious failing in the inspection related to the composition and operation of panel. The inspector is confident, however, that the fostering service is actively responding to these shortfalls, and that a properly constituted panel will fulfil its legal obligations and provide the important safeguarding function owed to children coming into the care of the local authority.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This standard was met.

The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide are now complete. Children and young people have been involved in producing the two Children's Guides that relate to different age groups.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standard 2-3)

2 of these 2 standards were met.

The fostering service is provided and managed by staff with appropriate skills and experience to do so.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

2 of these 2 standards were met.

The fostering service has been without a permanent manager for some time. However, a new manager has recently been appointed, and in the interim the fostering service has been managed by the Children's Services Manager, who has provided effective leadership during a period of rapid organisational change. The service is managed effectively and efficiently, and has procedures in place for monitoring the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

7 of these 9 Standards were met, 1 was partially met and 1 was not met.

Evidence obtained during the course of this inspection demonstrates that foster carers provide a high standard of care to looked after children and young people. Several foster carers had children in placement who were outside their original terms of approval, and there was little evidence of matching processes. Annual inspections of foster homes had not always been achieved.

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

6 of these 9 standards were met, 1 was partially met and 2 were not met.

The inspector found that those working in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people. They are generally well supported, although some carers do not have an allocated worker. Staff and carers have access to a wide range of appropriate training opportunities. The fostering service provider does not ensure, however, that all permanent appointments are subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation. Annual reviews of foster carers are not taken back to panel as required.

Records (Standards 24-25)

1 of these 2 standards was met.

The inspector found a high standard of recording on case files and other documentation examined. All the appropriate LAC forms were in place, including Action and Assessment Records. This is good practice. The inspector was also impressed with the quantity and quality of life story work being undertaken. Computer held information should record the address to which children go to on their discharge from care.

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (Standard 26)

This standard was met.

The premises are fit for purpose, although rather cramped following re-organisation.

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

Only standard 29 applies to Local Authorities. This standard was met.

The fostering service has a written policy on fostering allowances. These are currently being reviewed.

Fostering panels (Standard 30)

This standard was not met.

Along with the rest of the fostering service, the composition and functioning of the fostering panel is going through a period of transition. This was the most serious failing of the service; however the inspector is confident that the action plan already formulated to address these issues will result in a more robust and rigorous mechanism for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children in foster care.

Short term breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was met.

The short term break scheme, known as the Connect scheme, provides short breaks primarily for children with disabilities. Birth families are recognised as central to the service and there is good partnership working with the family and carer providing the service.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

This standard was not met.

The quality of assessments to panel for Regulation 38 placements was poor, and continued beyond the specified time limit without proper approval. The fostering service has already identified this as an area for development, however, and has appointed a member of staff to deal specifically with this group of carers.

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: YES

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:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	24	FS30	Establishment of Fostering Panel	Oct 2003
2	38	FS32	Timescales for the approval of family and friends as carers	Dec 2003

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission 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 and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	34	FS8	<u>Making of Placements</u> Except in the case of an emergency or immediate placement under Regulation 38, a responsible authority may only place a child with a foster carer if the terms of his approval are consistent with the proposed placement	30 th June 2004
2	21	FS15	<u>Employment of Staff</u> The fostering service shall ensure that all permanent appointments are subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation	31 st March 2005
3	29	FS21	<u>Reviews and termination of approval</u> A review shall take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.	30 th September 2004?
4	22	FS25	<u>Records with respect to fostering services</u> The fostering service provider shall maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2	31 st December 2004

5	24	FS30	<p><u>Establishment of Fostering panel</u> The fostering panel shall consist of no more than 10 members and shall include (a) two social workers employed by the fostering service provider, one of whom has child care expertise and the other of whom has expertise in the provision of a fostering service (c) in the case of the local authority at least one elected member of the local authority and (d) at least four other persons including at least one person who is or within the previous two years has been, a foster parent for a fostering service provider other than the one whose fostering panel is being established</p>	30 th June 2004
6	25	FS30	<p><u>Meetings of fostering panel</u> No business shall be conducted by a fostering panel unless at least five of its members, including the person appointed to chair the panel, or the vice chair, at least one of the social workers employed by the fostering service and at least two of the independent members, meet as a panel.</p>	31 st March 2004
7	26	FS30	<p><u>Functions of fostering panel</u> The fostering panel shall oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider</p>	30 th June 2004
8	38	FS32	<p><u>Emergency and immediate placements by local authorities</u> Where a local authority are satisfied that an immediate placement of a child is necessary, they may place a child after interviewing him, inspecting the accommodation and obtaining information about other persons living in his house, for a period not exceeding six weeks.</p>	30 th June 2004

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	FS6	The foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there. It is inspected annually to make sure that it meets the needs of foster children.
2	FS15	All people working in or for the fostering service are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities. Telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references.
3	FS22	Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker.

- 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	10
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	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	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	YES
Group discussion with children	YES
Date of Inspection	26/02/04
Time of Inspection	08.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	70

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

The scale ranges from:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded | (Commendable) |
| 3 - Standard Met | (No Shortfalls) |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
| 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?

3

The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide have now been completed, and these outline the aims and objectives of the fostering service. Children and young people have been involved in the production of the Children's Guide; this is good practice.

On the reverse of the younger Children's Guide, there is an agreement for both child and foster carer to sign up to, but not on the older Children's Guide. The inspector recommends that the two documents are made consistent in this respect, and that elected members formally approve the Statement of Purpose at the earliest opportunity.

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 service has been without a permanent manager for some time, but has recently appointed someone to this position who begins work in April 2004.

In the interim, the service has employed acting managers who have had the appropriate length of experience, competences and qualifications relevant to working with children. More recently, the Children's Services Manager has been managing the fostering service, and has provided strong leadership during a time of organisational change.

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

All appropriate references and police checks pertaining to the manager were as required. Criminal Records Bureau checks are renewed every three years, and records are now kept of these records and their outcomes.

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

There was documentary evidence that demonstrated the fostering service's policies and procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

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

2

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

2

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

Number of complaints made to NCSC 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

There is a clear job description for the manager of the fostering service. Clear lines of accountability exist.

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>It was evident from returned questionnaires, visits to foster carers, discussions with and observations of children and young people, and examination of case files that foster carers provide a high standard of care to foster children. 22 placing officers felt that foster carers looked after children 'very well indeed'.</p> <p>Homes visited were all warm, adequately furnished and equipped and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. Not all foster homes are inspected annually, but the inspector is confident that this is a task that can be accomplished during the annual review process or unannounced visits by the fostering service.</p> <p>They are supported in this work by skilled, experienced family placement workers, and a child-centred ethos within the department, which was evident in children's and young people's participation in decision-making and consultation processes. The inspector was particularly impressed with the amount and quality of life-story work being undertaken with individuals.</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 service has few carers of black or Asian origin, although has appointed a worker to help with improving recruitment from these and other ethnic groups. Progress needs to be made on this to fulfil the recommendation outlined in National Minimum Standard 7.2.</p> <p>The inspector visited households where children of dual heritage were placed, and it was evident that the fostering service had provided specialist advice and support to enable children's ethnic, religious and cultural background to be preserved. Carers also stated that they had found this helpful. That foster carers and social workers work co-operatively to enhance children's confidence and feeling of self-worth was clearly evident throughout this inspection.</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?	1
<p>It was difficult to find evidence from foster panel minutes or case files that matching considerations had been taken into account in the placing of children with foster carers. Foster carers described placements being made on bed availability rather than children's assessed needs and carers ability to meet these needs, although one foster carer described how a planned move had taken these into consideration. Only 2 of the 8 young people who attended the group participation meeting had a choice of placement.</p> <p>On cases examined, and in conversation with foster carers, it was evident that children and young people are regularly placed outside the category of the original approval of foster carers, and these changes are not brought back to panel for confirmation.</p>		

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)		
The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Foster carers were able to describe to the inspector the training they had received on child abuse, safe caring and managing behaviour. Each foster carer receives safe caring guidelines, and in conversation with the inspector, it was evident that this is priority for all carers in its widest sense.</p> <p>On files examined, there was comprehensive information about each child placed. However, several foster carers commented on their questionnaires that information was sometimes incomplete, and that important information was sometimes not shared with them – one example of this being a child abuser being placed in a family and the carer not being told about this which she felt had left her own children vulnerable.</p> <p>All placing officers who returned questionnaires stated that 'children were safe in this placement'. Of the consultation group, 6 young people said they felt safe in placement.</p> <p>Only the consultation group were asked a question on bullying. Four young people reported having been bullied; however only one incident happened in foster care. The figure below relates, therefore, only to the consultation group.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	50	%

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

That contact will continue with friends and family – unless there are clear reasons why this should not occur – is a given within the fostering service, and foster carers spoken to understood that part of their role would sometimes be to facilitate this contact where necessary and appropriate. One foster carer stated that she had found the training and information on contact issues very useful. Foster carers were very aware of the impact of contact on foster children, and were skilled at dealing with the consequences.

Five of the young people from the consultation group said that they can phone their friends 'anytime', and four stated they could phone their family 'anytime'. 32 placing officers stated that foster carers worked 'very well' with the child's family.

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

There is an active advocacy group, and children and young people are invited to discussion groups on issues such as sexual health. All the young people spoken to by the inspector felt that they were fully consulted both on decisions affecting their daily life and future, as well as aspects of the service they were receiving. Returned child questionnaires gave a slightly different picture, however. Although 18 children said they had been asked for their opinions about their foster carers, only 6 stated that they had been asked for their opinions about how the fostering service could be made better. Six of the young people in the consultation group 'always' attended reviews, and two 'sometimes'; however only 3 felt 'listened to'.

All cases tracked by the inspector showed evidence of children and young people being fully involved in reviews. Returned questionnaires indicated that children and young people knew how to make complaints and would know who to contact to do so, but only 8 indicated that they knew they could contact the National Care Standards Commission to make a complaint or raise a concern. The inspector recommends that, in the literature available to looked after children, this is made clearer to them.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)
The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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On case files examined, there was comprehensive information on the health status and health needs of individual children and young people, and it is commendable that agencies are working together to improve health outcomes for children in care. The majority of young people who completed their questionnaires stated that carers helped them with healthy eating and going to the doctors; only three of the consultation group said they receive regular medicals, but five visit the dentist 'regularly'. Six of the group said they can choose who they take to medical appointments.

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
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The fostering service places a high priority on meeting the educational needs of children and young people in its care. Case files examined contained Personal Education Plans, and foster carers spoken to felt that education was crucially important to young people's long term opportunities. All were very supportive, attending parent's evenings and keeping in close contact with schools. Again, this evidence of inter-agency working is commendable.

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
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Leaving care services are contracted out to a voluntary agency. A referral is made at the appropriate time to this service, called Signpost, and work begins to be undertaken on preparing the young people for his or her future beyond the age of 16. The inspector found that those who should have been referred to this service had been, and young people spoken to had found the service helpful. Foster carers were pro-active in helping equip young people with the skills they need to move on to independent living.

Young people in the consultation group, who were eligible for leaving care services, reported that they had learned independent living skills, and know who will support them when they leave. However only two of the three had a pathway plan.

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?

1

The fostering service has clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff. There is a rolling programme of re-submitting Criminal Records Bureau checks every three years.

Good practice was identified in that personnel have a system of checking the accuracy of individual details, including gaps in employment. However, the inspector understands that there is no longer a probationary period for new members of staff. This is a breach of current regulations, and one that the authority needs to address. The service also needs to ensure that telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references.

Total number of staff of the agency:

12

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

2

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?

3

There has been a recent reorganisation within the service, which has naturally meant some upheaval for all staff. Discussions with staff would also indicate that the absence of a permanent manager has cultivated a sense of 'drift' over recent months. It is to the credit of staff that the service has continued to function well. The service also benefits from a committed and skilled clerical team who provide efficient administrative backup.

Staff indicated that they receive supervision on a regular basis, and stated that they had found the close involvement of the Children's Services Manager invaluable in creating and maintaining a new sense of direction.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)		
The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There are still some staff vacancies, and this has resulted in a small number of foster carers having no allocated worker. Of the foster carers who returned their questionnaires, 25 felt that there was not enough staff in the fostering service.</p> <p>In common with many other local authorities, the fostering service struggles to recruit new carers and compete with private fostering agencies, but is pro-active in its recruitment programme. Assessment processes clearly delineate the tasks to be undertaken by foster carers, and cover all the points outlined in National Minimum Standards 17.7 in assessing the qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering.</p>		

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?	3
<p>The fostering service's employment practices are compliant with employment legislation, and the service generally provides good support for its staff and carers.</p> <p>There are management systems for carer supervision, appraisal and support, although the inspector suggests that these are implemented more consistently across the service.</p> <p>Foster carers can access the out of hours duty system for help, advice and assistance. However, several foster carers who returned their questionnaires commented did not feel that this was adequate, and again, the inspector recommends that managers look again at the duty system to ensure that foster carer's concerns are addressed.</p>		

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?	3
<p>The fostering service has training and development plans for all staff and foster carers. This is regularly evaluated. Some staff are undertaking post-qualifying awards, and the fostering service is beginning to implement NVQ training for carers. Carers in particular found that induction and on-going training was interesting, relevant and appropriate to their needs.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Staff reported that they receive regular supervision. There are regular staff and team 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?****1**

The fostering service's strategy is clear and well-documented, and is understood by staff spoken to. However, it needs to include clearer information about out-of-hours support, respite care and arrangements for reviews.

Annual reviews had not always been undertaken, and where they had, these were not brought back to panel. This is a regulatory failing which needs addressing, but one that the inspector believes is easily achievable.

There appears, in general, to be good communication between Family Placement Workers and children's social workers; however, comments on questionnaires returned from foster carers indicated that lack of communication with social workers was often an area of concern and frustration.

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 inspector found that the majority of foster carers receive supervisory visits, and although these were often written up, information was sparse and perfunctory. Some foster carers indicated that, although they met with Family Placement Workers regularly, they were not aware that they were being supervised. It is important that these meetings have a clear purpose, and that carers are clear that their work is being supervised. Not all foster carers have an allocated worker.

No unannounced visits take place to foster carer's homes, and there are a number of foster carers without a named worker.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

All foster carers spoken to – even those approved some time ago – remembered their induction training as being very useful and relevant to the task. Carers mentioned, on several occasions, how good training opportunities are, and they feel well supported in this respect. The fostering service is providing carers with the opportunity to undertake NVQ Level 2; one carer undertaking this commented that she found it very useful and rewarding.

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

The inspector found that case files examined contained comprehensive background information, and completed LAC paperwork. Action and Assessment records had also been completed, which is good practice. Files were methodically organised, which made information easy to access. The quality of recording was of a high standard, and conveyed to the inspector a real 'flavour' of the child and his/her circumstances. The inspector would like to commend staff on maintaining these exemplary records.

The inspector would also like to commend the service on the life story work that is clearly perceived as a fundamental component of the social work task, rather than an optional add-on.. Foster carers were also conversant with the importance of this work, and had been provided with the necessary equipment to undertake this work.

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

As in the above standard, other documentation was in place, easy to access and stored with regard to data protection and confidentiality. However, although records show that children and young people are discharged back to their communities, Schedule 2 specifically asks for an address to be recorded on discharge from care, and the service's database should be adapted to show this information.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

331

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

95

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

103

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

22

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

23

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

75.11

Maximum £

151.62

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The premises are part of a larger campus of offices occupied by Wakefield MDC. They are fit for purpose, but office space for administrative staff is rather cramped following re-organisation. There are efficient administrative systems, and appropriate measures to safeguard IT 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?

0

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?

0

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

Carers reported that they are paid promptly, although some commented, on questionnaires, that it was often difficult to get additional resources without a lengthy wait for decisions to be made.

The current system of allowances is undergoing review and will in future be linked to skills. Consultation is taking place with foster carers on this issue.

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?

1

This is the most serious failing of the inspection. The inspector found that panel has not been quorate since the last inspection, and conversations with staff and evidence from previous panel minutes suggests to the inspector that consideration of cases at panel has been perceived merely as a rubber-stamping exercise. As a result, one of the main safeguarding mechanisms for children coming into care has been absent. It is important therefore, that all decisions made since the last inspection are brought back to a properly constituted panel at the earliest opportunity for confirmation of approval and reconsideration of other decisions that may have been taken.

Although there were examples of good quality assessments, the inspector's view is that panel decisions are compromised and undermined by very poor social work assessments, particularly for Regulation 38 carers. The inspector was also concerned to observe that social workers give priority to attending training, rather than attending panel where crucial background information may need to be discussed. One of the functions of panel is to oversee the conduct of assessments, and the inspector would like to see this incorporated into the action plan mentioned below. Additionally, copies of references received should also be available for panel members to consider.

The inspector is encouraged, however, by the developmental work that is in place to remedy these deficits. The panel has had consultation from BAAF, and an action plan is in progress. A new panel chair has been appointed, who has already identified the need for a more rigorous and robust approach to consideration of cases. The composition of panel is being addressed and work is in progress to ensure this requirement is met.

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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	3
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There is a specific service within the fostering service for short breaks, known as the Connect scheme, used primarily for children with disabilities. Birth families are recognised as central to the service and there is good partnership working with the family and carer providing the service.

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?
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	1
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The fostering service is striving to meet the regulations related to this standard, although the achievement of this will depend to some extent on panel's functioning. A worker has recently been appointed to deal specifically with friends and family carers, and some creative and interesting development work is already underway. Family carers commented to the inspector that they felt well supported by the service, and had attended training and were part of a foster carer support group.

The timescale as required in regulation 38 is not, however, being met and this is something that now needs to be given priority, as it was also failed at the last inspection.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

N/a

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 26 February 2004 of Wakefield MDC - Family Placement Team and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

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

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of Wakefield MDC - Family Placement Team confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of Wakefield MDC - Family Placement Team 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.