



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Nottingham City Council Fostering Service

**14 Hounds Gate
Nottingham
Nottinghamshire
NG1 7BE**

Lead Inspector
Sharon Treadwell

Announced Inspection
2nd October 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Nottingham City Council Fostering Service
Address	14 Hounds Gate Nottingham Nottinghamshire NG1 7BE
Telephone number	0115 915 5555
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Nottingham City Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Sonia Cain
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

None

Date of last inspection 6th March 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Lynne Anderson (Service Manager Fostering) and Sonia Cain (Service Manager Fostering and Adoption) currently manage the Nottingham City Council Family Placement Service jointly.

The service is based at York House in Nottingham.

The Family Placement Team has responsibility for Adoption services as well as for the assessment and support of foster carers.

The Fostering and Adoption Service divides into the following teams: the Recruitment Team, the Assessment Team, three Support Teams (including the Black Support Team, which supports the service's black carers) and the Home from Home Team, which is managed by the Health and Disability Service. In relation to the Adoption function only there are additionally a City Adoption Team dedicated to home finding and a Post Adoption Support Team.

Each team has a designated Team Manager (in some cases job share) and an allocated team of social workers.

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose details that the following types of placements are provided: Emergency and short term placements; Bridging placements; Long term/permanent placements; Parent and child placements; Home from home placements; Remand placements; Supported lodgings; Foster lodgings.

At March 31st 2006, according to its Statement of Purpose, Nottingham City Council Fostering Service was supporting 194 foster carer households (including supported lodging providers and Home from Home Carers) and the number of placements being provided was 237.

SUMMARY

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

This was a planned inspection carried out by two inspectors, Sharon Treadwell and Trisha Gibbs, over five days. A pre-inspection visit was made to the service on July 4th 2006.

The inspection was carried out alongside an inspection of the Adoption Service and is the third inspection of the Nottingham City Family Placement Service within the last year (two fostering, one adoption). As a reflection of this only three young people and the two foster carers, with whom they are placed, were tracked. Tracking involves the inspection of case files, home visits and discussions with young people, foster carers, placing social workers and relevant agency staff, either in person or by telephone. Additional carers' and young people's files were examined as a result of information supplied in questionnaires or issues arising during the inspection.

During the inspection discussions were also held with the Fostering and Adoption Service Managers and Team Managers, members of the Looked After Children's Health Team, members of the Education Achievement Team, the Manager of the Contact Centre, members of the Training Team, a CAMHS representative, staff responsible for Contracts and Commissioning, a group of Independent Reviewing Officers and the Head of Safeguarding. A Foster Carer's Support Meeting was attended by one of the inspectors, who additionally met with two members of the Foster Carer Liaison Committee. An inspector attended a Carers' Celebration of Achievement Ceremony on July 4th, held at The Council House in Nottingham and attended by the newly appointed Director of Children's Services.

At the time of preparing this report, questionnaire responses had been received from 9 foster carers, 10 placing Social Workers and 12 young people, and the views contained in these have been reflected in the report. One questionnaire was returned by a parent and reflected satisfaction with the service provided.

A Fostering Panel was observed on October 6th and the inspector spoke to the Panel Chair and other panel members.

Prior to the inspection the Fostering Service provided the Commission for Social Care Inspection with a range of written information about the operation of the service. This information has informed this report.

What the service does well:

Young people spoken to during the inspection, and in their questionnaire responses, were positive about their foster care experiences: 'I get loved and well cared for and the right food'.

The FACE quarterly magazine is a good resource, providing carers with a range of information and encouraging them to recognise and promote the meeting of the five outcomes for young people in placement.

A range of excellent training opportunities is provided for foster carers, utilising staff skills as well as contracting the services of external trainers.

Several local support groups are operated, some with specific membership such as the black carers support group. A good range of additional support systems is provided: Foster Carer Liaison Committee, quarterly surgeries for foster carers and a dedicated out of hours support service.

Priority is given to recruiting foster carers from a variety of backgrounds to meet young people's diverse needs and the service provides an excellent range of training around equality/diversity issues for both staff and carers.

There is a robust system for tracking teenagers moving towards leaving care to ensure that they are fully aware of support and services available to them. Eleven young people were supported to access Higher Education opportunities last year.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The previous inspection was only six months ago and staff have made clear efforts to meet requirements identified during that inspection.

The Service has improved recording systems to better demonstrate matching considerations and safe caring. Safe Care policies have been developed for all fostering households

The Fostering Service has developed appropriate policy and procedural guidance relating to emergency and immediate placements made under Regulation 38.

A monitoring system has been introduced to ensure that Criminal Records Bureau checks are renewed at appropriate intervals.

What they could do better:

The Fostering Service must ascertain and evidence that the foster carer household identified to Service Managers during this inspection is suitable for any child in respect of whom approval is given

The Fostering Service needs to review its communication systems and relationships with other departments and ensure that foster carers are clear about people's professional responsibilities.

The Foster Care Agreement should be reviewed to ensure its inclusion of all elements listed under Schedule 5.

The Fostering Service should clarify recording expectations for carers and ensure that their records of placement are retained in a manner that makes them accessible to the child.

The Fostering Service should clarify its expectation of carers in relation to training, particularly areas such as First Aid, Safe Care and Child Protection, which should be renewed at intervals.

Foster Carer Allowances should be urgently reviewed to ensure coverage of the full cost of caring for young people placed.

The Fostering Service should retain full evidence of matching considerations in respect of every placement made and should evidence consideration of children already in placement.

The Fostering Service should develop a policy on bedroom sharing, which requires a risk assessment of the proposed arrangement and consultation with all of the young people involved.

The Fostering Service provider should ensure that all foster carers are provided with a written health record for all children, which can be updated throughout the placement and move with the child.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12.

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Young people's health needs are appropriately met by carers but those carers are not always provided with essential health information at the commencement of the placement. Carers' records relating to health do not move with the child.

EVIDENCE:

Young people, in their questionnaire responses, confirmed that their carers encouraged them to stay healthy: 'When I first went to K's house I wouldn't eat my veg or lettuce and now I do'; 'I eat healthy at home and at school and get help with my skin care'.

Foster Carers confirmed that they were encouraged and supported to prioritise young people's health needs 'The child we care for at present has health issues and the support I get with these is very good'; 'We are asked to promote healthy lifestyles through role modelling'.

Some placing social workers spoke positively about carers' promotion of health: 'They ensure that children have good access to health provision as well as exploring healthy lifestyles'.

Healthy eating is strongly promoted through the quarterly magazine (FACE) circulated to carers with the inclusion of informative articles and recipes.

Carers are provided with pro-forma recording sheets to record medical appointments and the administration of medication, although the latter were not observed being used by carers as the young people tracked had no

medication needs. Currently these records do not constitute a health record, which moves with the child (see Management).

The Looked After Children Health Team retains copies of young peoples Health Care Plans but the responsibility for instigating reviews remains with placing social workers. The new BAAF Health Assessment format has been introduced and some flexibility of venues, such as leisure centres, for health reviews has been introduced to encourage the co-operation of older children. The Team is actively involved in providing carer training, often alongside the CAMHS Team and the Achievement Team, for example 'Maximising Life Chances'.

At present carers are not provided with a copy of the annual medical report on young people in their care, although the inspectors examined correspondence between the Fostering Service Manager and the Area Health Authority endeavouring currently to address this. Carers cannot fully meet young people's health needs without access to relevant health information. Some Foster Carers expressed their concerns that important health information was not always provided to them when a child was placed, for example one carer had a child placed, who had a 'lactose intolerance' and this information was not supplied at the time of placement. This has the potential to place young people at serious risk.

Several carers were in fact critical of information supplied by placing social workers: 'We need more information and support from the child's social worker'; 'I think the information we receive could be much better'. The Fostering Service has a responsibility to chase the provision of information essential to its foster carers.

Two carers were critical of support to access nursery places for young children (to promote social development) with one detailing a two year wait for a place and another saying that after waiting for four and a half months she secured and funded the placement herself. The Fostering Service Managers however told inspectors that there was a 'large budgetary allocation' for nursery places and that these were never refused.

The Fostering Service has reduced tolerance in relation to smoking this year. Carers are not to smoke in the home and the Service will not approve carers who smoke to provide placements for children under five years. Panel Minutes evidenced that the Fostering Panel were very pro-active in re-enforcing this message.

A representative of the CAMHS Service was spoken to during the inspection and she confirmed that there was a fast track scheme for Looked After Children as well as a support/advice service for foster carers.

The Fostering Service does not have a stated expectation that carers will complete or update First Aid training.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30.

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Although the Fostering Service has begun to develop better pro-forma recording systems it is not always able to evidence that young people are appropriately matched with carers who can fully meet their needs and keep them safe.

EVIDENCE:

Appropriately qualified and experienced personnel manage the Fostering Service at all levels.

Five personnel files were examined during the inspection and appropriate checks were recorded. The Service is reminded of the need to undertake telephone checks on all references and advised to include this requirement within the check-list at the front of the personnel file.

The Service is additionally advised that the current Contract of Employment does not contain a confidentiality clause.

A requirement was identified during the previous inspection for the Fostering Service to better evidence the safeguarding of young people through the

implementation of safe care guidelines and through better recording of the matching process.

The Service has made clear efforts during the last six months to develop improved recording systems to evidence that young people are safely and appropriately placed. Every fostering household now has safe caring guidelines in place. The referral form, completed by the duty team at the point of placement, has been reviewed and revised to include completion of a risk assessment. In considering making a placement with an Independent Fostering Agency the Duty Team request the prospective carer's Form F assessment and complete a monitoring form to identify matching considerations. However staff informed the inspectors that there were currently a number of young people 'bouncing around the independent agencies', which would indicate inappropriate matching. Whilst some placing social workers felt that the Fostering Service matched young people well to placements: 'The Fostering Service provides a range of stable environments in which young people can develop positively and safely' others felt that there was poor investment in stability: 'We rarely receive information about the child in placement. It is seen as our role to ascertain that the placement remains stable'.

The Fostering Service Managers now need to monitor the completion of the new pro-forma to ensure consistency as the inspectors noted that, whilst some referral forms and risk assessments were satisfactorily completed, others contained minimal information and did not evidence matching considerations or identify shortfalls and detail how these would be addressed. Currently files do not evidence that young people already in placement are consulted as part of the matching process. Some of the carers spoken to during the inspection disputed that young people were appropriately matched to placements with one saying that it was 'heads on beds that counts and any head will do'.

Placing social workers, in their questionnaire responses largely said that placement choice was poor because of a placement shortfall but discussions with the Team Manager of the Recruitment Team evidenced a pro-active campaign to recruit additional foster carers, which has been strongly supported during the last year by the secondment of a Marketing Officer. The inspectors were additionally advised of current developments being undertaken in relation to the Local Authorities Commissioning Strategy. Meetings have taken place with a number of Independent Fostering Service Providers with a 'commitment to spending to ensure placements are appropriate'. There has been a recent review of all the Local Authority's current placements and a number of young people have been identified as needing to have alternative placements sought with an IFA. Commissioning strategies are in the early stage of development but staff spoken to during this inspection felt that currently cost was the major determinant in identifying IFA placements. The Authority strongly disputed this detailing that the major determinant for securing any placement was an appropriate match and that cost was a secondary consideration. Inspectors were advised that decisions relating to the appropriateness of a placement were always based on the young person's care plan.

The Fostering Service must clearly evidence a prioritising of appropriate matching.

The Fostering Service currently describes any accommodation by carers of young people outside their approval range as an exemption. This can lead to confusion since an exemption as detailed in the Children Act 1989 refers specifically to a carer accommodating more than three children. It has been suggested that the Fostering Service reviews this practice and considers differentiating between an exemption (more than three children) and a variation of approval.

In the case of both carers tracked during this inspection young people placed were required to share bedrooms. In one instance a young person was sharing with an adult and in another three young people were sharing a small bedroom, which required the bed to be moved to gain access to the wardrobe. The Independent Reviewing Officer for two of these young people was unaware of this arrangement. No specific risk assessments had been completed in relation to these bedroom sharing arrangements and there was no evidence on file of the young people's feelings about bedroom sharing. The Fostering Service has no policy on bedroom sharing and should develop one, which clearly details the requirement for an assessment of risk and for recorded consultation with the young people involved. Information about bedroom sharing arrangements should be included in reviews in order that Independent Reviewing Officers and the Fostering Panel are fully aware.

An excellent range of training opportunities is available to carers in relation to safe care, child protection and behaviour management but The Fostering Service needs to better clarify its expectation of carers in relation to training (see Management). The Fostering Service has a clear policy detailing acceptable and non-permissible sanctions.

During the inspection the file relating to one carer caused the inspectors some particular concerns. Over a period of several years allegations had been made by some of the young people who had been in placement and concerns had been raised by placing social workers about care provided in the placement. Minutes of a strategy meeting and some carer reviews were missing from the file. Work was ongoing with the carer around Health and Safety and safe care issues many years subsequent to approval

The inspectors considered that the written records did not appropriately evidence that the Fostering Service had demonstrated that the carer continued to be able to provide safe placements for Looked After Children. The Fostering Service Managers have been asked to review the file with a view to presenting a review to the Fostering Panel detailing all the allegations and concerns and clarifying progress made to demonstrate the carers continuing fitness. Completed reports will be forwarded to the Inspector.

The Fostering Panel was observed during the inspection and Panel minutes were inspected. Panel minutes are comprehensive and fully reflective of discussions held and questions raised. There was evidence of a robust panel, with a clear quality assurance role. Carers attending panel were made to feel relaxed without compromising the formality of the process and particularly commendable was the idea of having a foster carer to greet them and explain the panel process.

Discussions were held with the Managers and the Panel Co-ordinator during which they were advised to review current membership listings for the panel to ascertain that compliance is evidenced with regulatory requirements, particularly in relation to independence, membership numbers and social work experience.

The inspector has additionally confirmed that independent members must not be employees of Nottingham City Council.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13, 31.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Priority is given to recruiting foster carers from a variety of backgrounds to meet young people's diverse needs.

Fostering Service policies, promotional literature and training actively encourage carers to prioritise young people's educational achievements but individual carer's experiences indicate that appropriate support is not always easily accessed.

EVIDENCE:

The Recruitment Team has targeted its recruitment campaigns to promote applications from carers from a range of diverse backgrounds. This is evidenced in the material produced to support recruitment and in the targeting of church groups and areas of the city where cultural diversity is prevalent. The Recruitment Team has an exempted post for a black worker. The Recruitment Team Manager spoke highly of the positive impetus provided by the secondment to the team of a Marketing Officer.

The Fostering Service has a very positive work force balance in terms of culture and gender and has workers able to speak Punjabi and Urdu. The service makes and manages a number of trans-racial placements and has robust systems for monitoring these placements. Initially any trans-racial placement is agreed for only six weeks.

The service provides an excellent range of training around equality/diversity issues. All foster carers receive pre and post approval training focussing on parenting in a multi-cultural society. All managers attended training on 'Managing Diverse Teams' in 2005/2006 as well as a day's training on the Race Relations Amendment Act. The 'Maximising Life Chances' training includes coverage of a range of health and disability issues such as Epilepsy and Diabetes.

Nottingham City Council participated in research with two other authorities on the recruitment of black carers and planning and support for black Looked After Children moving towards Adoption. A directory of black resources is produced by the Fostering Service.

The service has a dedicated black carers' support team and, at the time of this inspection, details work in progress to develop a Looked After Children support group for black children.

The inspector attended a Carers' Celebration Ceremony as part of this inspection, which included the launch of a commendable range of educational toys, books and resource tools to promote young people's positive identity and sense of self worth. These are available to foster carers to undertake specific work with young people in their care. The Fostering Service Manager has been reminded of the need to continue to promote their availability and to clarify for all carers, how these resources can be accessed.

One of the Supervising Social Workers has designated responsibility for ensuring that claims are completed for young people entitled to Disability Living Allowance.

The Fostering Service is able to financially support carers with home adaptations, where appropriate, to facilitate the accommodation of a young person with a specific disability.

The Service has close links with the Health and Disability Service, which manages the Home from Home Scheme. The Team Manager of this scheme was interviewed during this inspection and an approval of Home from Home foster carers was observed at the Fostering Panel.

The Home from Home Team has two Full Time Equivalent Social Workers who work generically in recruiting, assessing and supporting the scheme's foster carers (currently 18 carer households). Fifty Link workers are also employed across the Disability Service. The scheme has its own carer support group and has produced a range of consultation paperwork for young people, appropriate to their range of abilities. One worker from the team is on the Editorial Team of FACE to ensure appropriate representation of these carers' issues.

The magazine strongly promotes carers' awareness of educational issues.

The Local Authority has a dedicated Looked After Children Achievement Team, which works on a referral basis and whose areas of work include underachievement, risk of exclusion, bullying, re-integration, mentoring and attendance.

Questionnaires recently completed by young people who have received support from the team indicate that they have found this very helpful. The team provides a weekly homework club available to twelve children. Carers spoken to said the homework club was valued by young people and expressed their wish that the opportunity could be extended to more children. A team of five Education Welfare Officers are employed within the team. Currently four of these support young people in residential care whilst one supports young people in foster care. The Acting Head of Children's Services told the inspectors that this apparent imbalance had been recognised by management and was being rectified.

Young people spoke positively of the educational support provided by their carers and schools: 'Whenever I need help with my homework K will always help me'; 'I have got good in all my subjects'; 'I don't need special help at school but its there if I want it'.

Four educational trips have been arranged for carers and young people during the last year and these were well attended and positively received.

The Foster Carer Liaison Committee also organise social events for carers and young people.

A separate manual is provided to foster carers detailing their responsibilities to promote young people's educational attendance and achievement and providing a range of information and contacts. The manual is currently being reviewed and updated. The format for developing Personal Education Plans has also recently been revised and a more child friendly version developed. A recent article in FACE clarified what carers should expect a PEP to include.

The inspectors would particularly commend the achievements of young people accessing higher education.

During the inspection one carer raised concerns around a young person in placement with specific literacy needs, which were not being met. This case has been discussed with the Fostering Service Managers.

Some carers expressed particular concerns regarding children and young people attending County Schools rather than City Schools, who apparently are not eligible for support from the Achievement Team. This issue has been raised with Service Managers who need to have an awareness of the particular vulnerability of this group of young people and determine strategies to meet any identified educational support needs.

Some of the carers spoken to during this inspection and in their questionnaire responses cited communication between departments as an issue. It was

particularly referred to, by one carer in relation to education: 'I have been fighting to get a statement for one of my foster children, for support, for the last year. We are no further forward because social workers never return calls from inclusion support'.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10, 11.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency consults with young people and actively promotes contact between young people and their families.

EVIDENCE:

During the inspection the inspectors visited Nottingham City's Contact Centre, which re-opened in May 2004. The centre provides a high standard of accommodation to facilitate contact arrangements, with supervision, where needed, by experienced staff. Clear contractual arrangements are negotiated with all parties and transport can be provided. Parents are made to feel welcome at the centre, which is very secure, and a range of individual rooms are available providing good facilities according to need, for example there are bathing facilities for parents of young children to bath them as well as cooking facilities where families can prepare and eat a meal.

There are plans currently to extend the opening hours of the contact centre, which currently opens weekdays from 8am.

Young people are consulted about the appropriateness of contact arrangements within their annual reviews, which are chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer. Questionnaires completed by young people prior to this inspection confirmed that all those returning forms were happy with their current contact arrangements.

The files tracked during this inspection evidenced carers actively promoting and supporting young people's contact with their birth families. In the case of

two very young children a carer was facilitating extremely frequent contact with a birth parent.

The Assessment Team told the inspectors that the service currently had 'several excellent carers who provide a bridging to adoption service'.

Some carers commented to an inspector that, where contact is arranged by placing social workers, there is not always appropriate feedback to the carer when the child is returned to the foster home. Any subsequent re-action by the child can then be difficult to understand or manage. This has been raised with Fostering Service Managers to address with Child Care Operational Team Managers.

The Contact Centre staff confirmed that they always feed back to foster carers.

The service is reminded that, where contact arrangements are facilitated or supervised by foster carers, a risk assessment should be completed.

Young people feel that they are well consulted by their foster carers: 'My opinions are listened to and I don't stop talking'; 'I can always talk to my carers about any problems'; 'Every time I talk she listens carefully'.

The Authority has a dedicated Participation Worker and a Participation Group consisting of young people who have left the care system and who undertake work with staff as well as sitting on interview panels.

The Fostering Service has recently circulated questionnaires to both young people and foster carers to determine how satisfied they are with the services provided. The questionnaire for young people asks them about opportunities to make positive choices, whether they are treated the same as birth children in the family and whether they think pocket money is adequate. Some responses have been received from both carers and young people and the Service Managers confirmed that, so far, these were generally 'very positive'.

Two 'Children who foster' groups are well established and meet regularly on a social basis. The birth children of one of the carers visited confirmed that they were well consulted during the assessment process and given answers to their questions about fostering.

The Fostering Service has recently developed an excellent induction pack for young people, which provides a comprehensive range of information about fostering. Young people have been actively involved in its development. It is attractively presented and information is easily accessed.

A training course is offered to carers ('Creative Reviewing'), which details a range of ways to encourage young people to attend their reviews and contribute to them effectively.

Currently the Fostering Service does not collect the views of young people in placement in respect of the annual review of the foster carer and the inspectors would encourage that a system be developed for doing this.

No complaints have been received in the last year from children in foster care. A Children's Rights Service is commissioned from the National Youth Advisory Service

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

14, 29.

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Good systems are in place to monitor young people moving towards leaving care to ensure that they are fully aware of support and services available to them.

The current foster carer payment system is not clearly stated in a policy document and does not cover the full costs of caring for a child.

EVIDENCE:

All Looked After Children have access to 'After Care' services provided by the Leaving Care Team. The Team Manager of this team was interviewed during the inspection and confirmed the introduction of systems for tracking young people from age fifteen and a half to raise their awareness of the support available to them and to ensure that they don't 'fall through the net' through early closure of cases. The service has designated Connexions workers, welfare rights workers and designated CAMHS support. The CAMHS worker told the inspectors that young people, at this stage of their lives were much more inclined to access counselling services made available to them. Only one worker is a qualified social worker (able to deal with any child Protection issues), but the remaining members of the seventeen strong team have a range of relevant qualifications and experiences.

There has been good promotion in FACE of the role of the Connexions Workers in supporting young people with leaving care plans.

Last year eleven young people were supported to access Higher Education opportunities.

Last year the Leaving Care Team were actively supporting 170 care leavers.

One carer visited during the inspection was providing excellent support to teenagers to move towards independence and to young people who had left care.

There is good involvement of the Corporate Parenting group in providing work opportunities for Looked After Children. The scheme began two and a half years ago and 21 young people have been employed or are in training for posts.

A 'Family Learning Day' is currently being planned to identify and address shortfalls in literacy and numeracy skills with both young people and carers and to identify support and learning opportunities.

During this inspection the current Foster Carer Payment System was severely criticised by foster carers and by supervising and placing social workers: 'Remuneration is extremely low, particularly for teenagers who need a lot more funding if they are to have a lifestyle on par with their peers'; The current system features a basic 'Boarding Out Allowance', based on the age of the child placed, with a range of additional payments claimable either through supervising or placing social workers, some requiring authorisation from Fostering Service Team Managers or Service Managers and others by Child Care Operations Team or Service Managers. The complexity of this system frequently leads to long delays in carers receiving the additional payments claimed. Panel Minutes examined during this inspection evidence that this issue has been raised by the panel, in relation to specific carers. One carer told the inspector of a five months wait for a claim of around £1000. Carers additionally reported differences in allowances paid 'depending on how pushy and difficult you are'.

Currently areas such as young people's personal care need are addressed through additional allowance payments. Foster carers advised the inspector that they were entitled to claim a £2.50 allowance per month for personal care if they provided a placement to a dual heritage child. This method of determining payments appeared discriminatory but service managers confirmed that personal care allowances were claimable in respect of all young people and that additional payments were also available in respect of educational support, sporting activities and leisure pursuits.

Allowances relating to young people's specific individual needs are subject to an individual manager's discretion.

Representatives of the Foster Carer Liaison committee told the inspector that carers had been increasingly angered and upset by the introduction of a requirement to provide receipts now for all additional monies claimed. Carers

said they felt 'not trusted', 'not valued' and that they were treated like 'glorified baby sitters'.

A review of Foster Carer Allowances has been underway for two years with a proposal made by the Fostering Service Management to replace the existing system with an over arching scheme to provide carers with a payment covering the care needs of the young person in placement. The inspectors were advised that delays had resulted from re-organisation within the Local Authority and latterly from the work on implementation of national minimum payments.

The Fostering Service has introduced the 'Teen Care' system, which provides additional payments to carers of young people aged ten and over with challenging behaviours and an Accreditation System. The Accreditation System involves Supervising Social Workers recommending a carer's progression in accordance with demonstrated skills and abilities and attendance at specified training.

Foster Carers claim that the accreditation scheme is not linked to the types of young people placed. Carers claim that young people are labelled, for example, as Level 4 placements but may be placed with Level 1 carers. The labelling of young people in this way is not appropriate and Fostering Service Managers said this should not happen, however the inspector noted one file which did label two very young people in this way. One carer told the inspector that as relatively new carers they had taken two young people following a breakdown of placement with a Level 4 carer.

The inspectors have clarified with Fostering Service Management that a resolution to issues around Fostering Allowances is now urgent since the current situation must impact on Looked After Children in foster placements. Changes to the system should be accompanied by the development of a written policy on fostering allowances, which the Fostering Service does not currently have. This should be included in the Carers' Handbook along with a breakdown of what is included in the Foster Carer Allowance and clear details of any additional expenses payable and how to access them.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 32.

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Fostering Service has a clear structure with qualified and experienced managers. Better systems of communication and improved consistency would make staff and foster carers feel more valued.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose was reviewed and updated in September 2006 and contains fully appropriate information about service provision and operation.

A new induction pack has been prepared, in consultation with young people and the format and content is commended.

Considerable re-organisation has taken place within Nottingham City Council in establishing a Children's Service. A new Director of Children's Services is now in post and inspectors were advised that other permanent senior appointments have either been made or are imminent. There have been considerable changes to both structure and personnel and Fostering Service staff say that potential changes within their Service remain likely. Currently there is some distinction between management of the Fostering and Adoption Services with Lynne Anderson managing the former and Sonia Cain the latter, whilst providing support to Lynne, who works 4 days a week. Liaison with Adoption Inspectors during this inspection would support the current differential developmental needs of these two services.

Social Work Staff largely work across Fostering and Adoption Services. Staff morale was noted not to be good, at the time of this inspection, with dissatisfaction about pay differentials with staff (less experienced) working in Child Care Operations Teams or in neighbouring authorities, failure to fulfil promises of financial reward for completion of post-qualification training, staff shortages due to posts being frozen during re-organisation (now beginning to be addressed) and continuing uncertainty about the future management and operation of their own service.

Staff detailed that, although staff turnover was generally low, experienced staff had been lost during this time, mostly to another authority. A job evaluation process is currently underway.

Staff spoken to did confirm good access to training opportunities and a good system for formal supervision and appraisal.

Currently computers are provided to Fostering Service staff at a ratio of one to three or one to two staff. The implication of this is that many supervising social worker records are hand written. In some cases this was identified as inappropriate, for example the summary record relating to allegations and concerns against carers, which needs to be more easily legible.

There is a stated intention for the service to move towards retaining records electronically and, as this moves forward, the shortfall in relation to IT equipment will need to be addressed.

Although Fostering Service Managers told inspectors of improved relationships with Child Care Operational Teams, foster carers and placing social workers were critical of communication generally: 'The Fostering Service is not transparent or approachable as a whole'; 'There is a very clear division between child care and fostering and much antipathy'; 'There needs to be greater integration and better communication'; 'The department and especially the child's social worker should liaise more with fostering. Calls should be returned'.

Foster Carers were generally critical of communication, one carer quoting three different sets of advice given by supervising social worker, placing social worker and a member of the Achievement Team in relation to a child returning to school. A number of carers commented 'no-one ever rings you back'.

Foster Carers generally rated the support provided by their supervising social worker as good: 'We think our best service is our supervising social worker who is always there for us'; 'Our own social worker is with us all the way'. Written records evidenced that good levels of contact were retained with foster carers, by supervising social workers and that appropriate levels of supervision were generally maintained.

The Foster Carer Liaison Committee has been newly formed during the last year and is working pro-actively to organise social events and encourage carers to use it as a forum to raise issues of general concern. The committee meets regularly with Fostering Service Managers. Additionally there are quarterly surgeries for foster carers to talk through with staff any problems with young people's behaviour. A range of Foster Carer support Groups are operated and the Service operates its own out of hours support service.

Form F assessments examined during this inspection were completed to a good standard and the Fostering Service has developed appropriate policy and procedural guidance relating to emergency and immediate placements made under Regulation 38. This was a concern identified during the previous inspection.

An impressive range of training opportunities is provided to carers and staff. Several members of the Workforce Development Team met with the inspectors and provided details of the training programmes available. Some training is purchased from external providers such as Fostering Network, whilst some is provided 'in house' utilising the skills of the CAMHS Team, the Looked After Children Health Team, the Achievement Team and staff and foster carers. A new post-approval, foundation package entitled 'First Steps in Foster Care' is currently being piloted. The programme contains excellent material and is completed by carers in a portfolio-based format with support from their supervising social worker. The inspectors would suggest that the learning material contained in this package would be instructive to a wide range of carers, not just those who are newly approved.

The 'First Steps' course provides ideal preparation for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). There has been good development of the NVQ training programme for foster carers with some supervising social workers being trained in the provision of 'expert witness' statements and six carers successfully completing NVQ level 3.

Statistics supplied by the Workforce Development Group evidence that foster carer take up of training generally is poor. No training portfolio is retained on foster carers files to indicate training undertaken although the foster carer review does detail training undertaken in the last year.

Workers from the training sector were noted to be enthusiastic and committed to enhancing training opportunities for Fostering Service staff and carers and to facilitating opportunities to join with staff from associated professional areas. These opportunities need to be strongly promoted by supervising social workers, with their carers.

The Foster Care Agreement should be reviewed to ensure its inclusion of all elements listed under Schedule 5. The inspectors would suggest that the Fostering Service also include some expectations in relation to carer training. Written information supplied to the inspectors details an expectation that all carers will attend three training courses each year. This expectation is not recorded and not enforced.

Training was commissioned earlier this year from Fostering Network on 'Supporting foster carers-The role of the supervising social worker'. The take up of this training was poor with only six supervising social workers attending.

Kinship Carers are supported and supervised in exactly the same way as mainstream foster carers and are able to access the same training opportunities. There are slight differences in the approval system to reflect the child specific nature of approval. The Fostering Service is reminded that, if a carer approved for a child specific placement is to be considered for the provision of other fostering services, some additional assessment work should be evidenced.

Child Care Operational Team files related to young people tracked, which were examined during this inspection, contained appropriate information. The Fostering Service also retains relevant information relating to children in placement, within the foster carer's file.

Foster Carers' files were difficult to access as they lacked structure and consistency. The files did however contain full details of contact and supervision. Records of foster carer annual reviews were missing in some files and the fostering Service Managers have been reminded of the need to chase these records.

Foster carers are provided with pro-forma recording sheets to record health issues and contacts but currently these are not retained to constitute a record

of the child's foster placement. No record is retained currently relating to educational issues.

The Foster Carers' Handbook advises carers 'There may be a variety of ways that information should be recorded.....check with your supervising social worker and the placing social worker on the best way'. This does not promote consistency.

The Fostering Service has introduced quarterly supervision sessions with foster carers to a specific agenda, which assesses the progress of young people in placement against the five outcomes. This is valuable information, which is not currently included in a record relating to the young person.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	1
8	2
9	2
15	3
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	3
31	3

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

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	3
29	1

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS6 FS9	33, 27	The Fostering Service must ascertain and evidence that the foster carer household identified to Service Managers is suitable for any child in respect of whom approval is given	30/11/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS22	The Foster Care Agreement should be reviewed to ensure its inclusion of all elements listed under Schedule 5.
2.	FS16	The Fostering Service needs to review its systems of communication/relationships with other departments and ensure that foster carers are clear about people's professional responsibilities.
3.	FS24	The Fostering Service should develop a recording policy for carers and clear guidance on recording expectations should be incorporated in the Carer's Handbook. Foster carers' records of placement should be retained in a

		manner that makes them accessible to the child.
4.	FS21	The Fostering Service should clarify its expectation of carers in relation to training and a training record should be placed on the carers file to indicate courses attended.
5.	FS29	The Fostering Service should fully clarify with staff and carers that the Accreditation Scheme relates to foster carers' qualifications, experience and skill levels and that the Levels within it should not be used to label young people.
6.	FS29 FS22	The Fostering Service should develop a written policy on fostering allowances, which should be included in the Carers' Handbook along with a breakdown of what is included in the Foster Carer Allowance and details of any additional expenses payable and how to access them. Foster Carer Allowances should be clearly non-discriminatory
7.	FS8	The Fostering Service should ensure that it retains full evidence of matching considerations in respect of each placement made. This record should indicate any potential shortfalls in relation to the match and how these will be addressed. Where other children are already in placement consultation with these young people must be evidenced.
8.	FS6	The Fostering Service should develop a policy on bedroom sharing, which clearly details the requirement for an assessment of risk and for recorded consultation with all of the young people involved. Information about bedroom sharing arrangements should be included in reviews in order that Independent Reviewing Officers and the Fostering Panel are fully aware of arrangements.
9.	FS12	The Fostering Service provider should ensure that all foster carers are provided with a written health record for all children, which can be updated throughout the placement. All foster carers should be provided with First Aid training at appropriate intervals.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Leicester Office

The Pavilions, 5 Smith Way

Grove Park

Enderby

Leicester

LE19 1SX

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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