



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Dudley Local Authority Fostering Agency

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Ednam House

1 St James Rd

Dudley

West Midlands

DY1 3JJ

21st February 2005

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

Dudley Local Authority Fostering Agency

Address

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Ednam House,
1 St James Rd, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 3JJ

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

01384 813580

Address

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Ednam House,
1 St James Rd, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 3JJ

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

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NA

Date of last inspection

05/01/04

Date of Inspection Visit		21st February 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Christine Lancashire	106038
Name of Inspector	2	Linda Elsaleh	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Marlene Caldwell	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

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

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

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 Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Dudley Local Authority Fostering Agency. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

This is the fostering service of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. It is based in the centre of Dudley in a building shared by other Social Services workers. The aim of this service is 'to offer a family placement to all children looked after by Dudley Metropolitan Borough when this is the agreed option. The underlying principle is 'to provide looked after children in foster care with an experience of family life which promotes their physical and emotional well being and happiness throughout their childhood. Whilst most of the foster placements are organised and supervised by members of the dedicated fostering team, long term fostering is still handled by the adoption team and kinship placements are handled by the area teams. Action is being taken to merge these services. The main focus of this inspection was the work of the fostering team.

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.)

As part of this inspection, the inspectors spoke with members of the team, foster carers and young people. Questionnaire responses were received from carers, young people, placing social workers and fostering social workers. The inspectors also attended a panel meeting and a meeting of level 3 foster carers. The inspection covered key standards, including those where requirements and recommendations had been made in the last report. Standards which were not assessed at this visit were met at the last inspection.

The inspectors are pleased to note that progress has been made towards meeting the requirements of the previous report. This includes the creation of posts which will enable the service to undertake work in relation to kinship care and long term fostering. The service has been short-staffed during the past year, for various reasons, but foster carers confirmed that they still felt well supported by the fostering team. It is evident that there is a good level of communication between the team and the carers and that there are opportunities for differences of opinion and requests for resources to be explored.

Statement of Purpose(Standard 1)

This standard was fully met.

The service has a clear Statement of Purpose which includes the information required by this standard. The children's guide to the service summarises this information in an accessible form.

Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2 and 3)

The one standard assessed was met.

The manager is appropriately qualified and experienced to carry out her role. Checks are carried out on new applicants for manager posts within the service. There is evidence that checks on existing staff are renewed every three years.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4 and 5)

The one standard assessed was not met.

There are clear lines of accountability within the service. There are arrangements for ensuring quality. However, parts of the service are managed by other teams within the department. The planned action which will bring all the fostering work within one service was explained to the inspectors. This process needs to be completed.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

8 of these 9 standards were met, including 1 where the standard was exceeded.

The foster homes visited by the inspectors were found to be suitable environments. The foster carers are made aware of Health and Safety issues and these are discussed at the time of approval. The inspectors were informed that there are occasional placements, which are above the approved number for the carer. These should not occur. The service needs to have a formal process for ensuring that children who are placed overnight in an emergency are moved to a more suitable location the next day.

There is an emphasis on valuing diversity within the service. The service has identified the

need to recruit more Black and Asian carers and attempts are being made to do this. The carers are provided with information about the protection of children. Foster carers have a good understanding of and commitment to enabling children to maintain contact with their birth families where appropriate. There are good systems for encouraging children to express their views. There are good arrangements for ensuring that the health needs of children are met. The service places a very high priority on ensuring that educational needs are met. Young people are enabled to develop independence skills.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15-23)

All of the 6 standards assessed were met.

There are good arrangements for the recruitment and organisation of staff. Staff are appropriately supervised and have good opportunities for training. The department has a 'Whistle Blowing' policy. Carers receive appropriate support and have access to a wide range of training opportunities.

Records (Standards 24 and 25)

These standards were not fully met.

Whilst adequate records are maintained in most respects, the inspectors found that the LAC paperwork was not complete in relation to children in foster placements. It is recognised that this is the responsibility of the area social workers. There were also differences between information recorded in the electronic system and the manual system. This should be addressed. Staff also reported difficulties with reliability of the IT systems.

Fitness of Premises for Use as a Fostering Service (Standard 26)

This standard is not met.

The premises have limited working space and parking facilities. This will be compounded by the appointment of additional staff to undertake the long term and kinship carers. There are secure facilities for the storage of information. There is disability access to the ground floor of the building.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

These standards were not assessed.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This standard is met.

There are procedures which govern the operation of the panel. The panel is suitably composed and was observed to function appropriately.

Short-Term Breaks (Standard 31)

This standard is not applicable.

This service is provided by an independent provider.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This standard is not met.

The Area teams manage this area. Action is being taken to assimilate this work into the service.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

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:

The fostering service does not fully meet the regulations specified in the 'requirements' section of this report. These failures, which are not substantial, have been discussed with the manager and appropriate action is planned by the service.

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	34 & 38	FS6	The manager must ensure that foster carers remain within their approved numbers.	1 st October 2005

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Chris Lancashire Signature _____
Second Inspector Linda Elsaleh Signature _____
Regulation Manager Mike Gerard Signature _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	10	FS5	The manager must complete the process of merging all the fostering services under one manager.	1 st October 2005
2	34	FS24FS25	The manager and fostering social workers must ensure that the area social workers supply the necessary information in relation to the child's history and needs at the time of referral or as soon as possible afterwards.	1 st July 2005
3	23	FS26	The manager must ensure that the service is housed in suitable premises.	1 st October 2005

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	FS9	The inspectors recommend that the carers' handbook should refer the reader to the longer guide for additional information in relation to bullying.
2	FS14	The inspectors recommend that foster carers are provided with more detailed information in relation to preparation for adulthood.
3	FS18	The inspectors recommend that the manager should review the arrangements for 'out of hours' support and contact.
4	FS21	The inspectors recommend that the manager develops more detailed information for carers about the provision of respite care.
5	FS25	The inspectors recommend that, if two systems are used to record data, there should be a means for ensuring that both show the same details.

* 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	8
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)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	NO
• 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
Date of Inspection	22/2/2005
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	60

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

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a clear Statement of Purpose, which includes the information required by standard 1.4 and clearly sets out the services provided. This is approved by the elected members on an annual basis and is made available to interested parties. The fostering service's policies, procedures and written guidance for staff reflect the contents of the Statement of Purpose. The Children's Guide summarises this information in an accessible form. This now includes details of how to contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection and young people confirmed that they had received copies of this booklet.

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?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed at this visit.

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?
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	3
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The inspectors received verbal confirmation that telephone enquiries are made to follow up references in respect of persons managing the fostering service. Standard recruitment processes are carried out in respect of all staff and records are maintained of references received. Criminal Records Bureau checks are obtained in relation to all newly employed staff at all levels. There is now a system for ensuring that checks are renewed in relation to existing staff on a three-yearly basis.

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?

0

This standard was not assessed at this visit.

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

7

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

1

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

5

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

X

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?****2**

Staff files confirmed that the manager has a clear job description and staff confirmed that lines of accountability are clear. These are recorded in the Statement of Purpose. The staff and manager confirmed that there are clear and suitable arrangements for the provision of cover when the manager is absent. At the previous inspection, the inspectors identified the need to explore the possibility of merging all the fostering services. Progress has been made in this area. This will involve the recruitment of two new workers and the inspectors were informed that these posts will be advertised in the near future. A post for a social worker to support kinship carers will also be advertised shortly, to enable the transfer of these carers into the existing service. A review of administration support will also be carried out.

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
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The foster carers' handbook provides written guidance on Health and Safety issues in the home and environment. Foster carers receive training in this area. The policy and procedure documents and the handbook specify the need to review each home annually and to inspect the premises against the Health and Safety standards. Health and Safety issues are discussed at panel at the time of approval and annual review. The inspectors visited four foster homes and these were found to be warm, homely and adequately furnished. They were decorated and maintained to good standards of cleanliness and hygiene. Those homes providing for young children were equipped with suitable guards and other equipment. Preparation for foster carers covers Health and Safety issues and carers are made aware of their responsibilities in this respect. Supervising social workers check that the transport used by carers is appropriate and suitable to the needs of the child. Foster carers had been made aware that they may be interviewed or visited as part of the inspection process.

At the previous inspection, the inspectors were concerned to hear of examples of young people being placed in emergencies over and above the approval level for the carers. During the past year, pressure for placements has increased and there continues to be examples of foster carers who have taken placements over their agreed numbers. Such instances are reported to panel. This includes emergency placements of young people in circumstances where they have had to use temporary beds on a short-term basis for one or two nights and instances where young people, who are not siblings, have shared a bedroom. This is clearly not best practice in terms of choice and privacy for the young people concerned.

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

The handbook and the policies and procedures draw the attention of staff and carers to issues of equal opportunities. There is a short statement of guidance in assisting carers to care for a child placed from a different culture to their own. Carers are expected to attend a training course on caring for children with disabilities and one on understanding racism and heritage. The Department contributes to an annual Valuing Diversity Children's Conference with the surrounding authorities. Carers also attend this. The fostering team is diverse in terms of ethnic background and staff confirmed that information and expertise is exchanged between members of the team. Although the service has some carers from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the manager and team have identified the need for further recruitment of Black and Asian carers to provide greater choice and diversity. Sampled carers provided examples of children who had been placed with carers who were from a different culture to that of the child. Carers provided examples of how they had made efforts to meet the children's needs and of the advice and guidance which had been provided to enable the child's cultural needs to be met.

Visits to foster carers and conversations with children revealed examples of children being given encouragement to pursue talents, interests and hobbies. The department holds award ceremonies to celebrate and recognise the achievement of children in care in a wide range of fields. These are valued by the children and the carers, who spoke with enthusiasm about these events.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The assessments of carers specify their strengths and weaknesses and outline the reasons for specific approvals. These elements are also discussed at the panel at the time of approval and review. Placement decisions consider the child's assessed racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic needs and these are matched as closely as possible with the characteristics of the foster family. Workers confirmed that attempts are made to match specific young people to appropriate placements at all times, but there are constraints on matching which arise from the number of placements available and the number of referrals at times. This has resulted in some cross-cultural placements.

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

The foster carers' handbook identifies appropriate forms of control. It is clear that smacking, or any form of physical chastisement is not allowed. Carers are expected to sign to indicate that they will abide by these standards. There is a joint protocol for children who go missing within the West Midlands Area. This has been approved by the Area Child Protection Committee. Carers have been advised of the appropriate action to take. There is a system for monitoring these incidents and a report is sent to the Departmental Management Team on a monthly basis. Meetings are planned with the police to review practice in this area. Each carer is expected to attend courses on Self Care and Allegations, Caring for Children who have been Sexually Abused, and Sex and Sexuality. There are management systems to collate details of incidents of a Child Protection nature and these are reviewed annually. There are internal procedures, which result in significant concerns or complaints being taken to the Fostering Panel. Foster carers indicated awareness of the need to ensure that children in their care do not experience bullying. They were aware of arrangements within the education service to address this. The inspectors are pleased to report that the service has now produced an anti-bullying guide for carers. This provides information about the signs and symptoms of bullying, together with information about the action to take and useful contacts. Brief details with regards to bullying are also included in the new draft carers' handbook. The inspectors recommend that the handbook should refer the reader to the longer guide for additional information.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

100

%

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?**

4

The foster carers' handbook specifies the need to promote contact between children and families and to encourage carers to enable this contact within their own homes where appropriate. The Policies and Procedures manual details support and guidance in relation to this issue. The LAC procedures ensure that contact is addressed at each stage of the planning process. Foster carers provided examples of work, which had been undertaken to ensure that children were enabled to maintain the agreed level of contact with significant people in their lives and they also demonstrated awareness of the need to provide additional support to the child prior to and after contact. They recognised the emotional effect on the child and, in some cases, described significant changes in behaviour. Carers demonstrated an impressive degree of sensitivity to the issues involved.

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

The foster carers' handbook encourages carers to listen to children and provides information on advocacy, complaints and children's rights. The service is a member of the Black Country Children's Rights project and runs a 'Just Say It' group for children in the care of the local authority. Young people are also involved in the assessment panel and the 'Who Cares' initiative. Use is made of 'Viewpoint', the computer programme which aims to enable young people to contribute more effectively to their review process. Young people provided examples of times when their opinions have been sought and these included activities, meals, clothing, contact visits and at the time of review. The views of the children of foster carers are also sought in relation placements and other issues. These young people also have to the opportunity to attend the 'Children Who Foster' Support group. The Children's Guide to the service provides space to record the telephone numbers of the relevant fostering worker and area social worker. Inspectors were concerned to learn that some young people receive infrequent or very short visits and that many do not have an opportunity to see their social worker outside the foster home. It is acknowledged that area teams are not under the management of the fostering manager. However, the issue of contact outside the home needs to be raised.

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

The foster carers' handbook provides information for carers on managing the health needs of children in placement. Training is provided in first aid, HIV/Aids and child development. Each carer is expected to keep records of health needs, immunisations and interventions and social workers are expected to provide carers with full health details at the time of placement. This is not always possible, as social workers do not always have access to this information, especially where children are placed in an emergency. However, this information should be provided as soon as possible and foster carers reported that it is not always provided within reasonable timescales. Use is made of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and a half-day per week is provided for consultation for carers on managing distressed children. The manager is introducing new files for carers to try to ensure that the correct records are maintained. At last year's inspection it was noted that there was a nominated health professional with responsibility for children in care in the borough and that this person is a member of the fostering panel. In addition, the service now has a designated doctor and second nurse on a weekly half-day basis.

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

The service places a very high priority on meeting the educational needs of children who are looked after. The carers' handbook, the policies and procedures and the new Joint Education policy identify the role of carers in this area and support, guidance and information is available to encourage their role. The education support team drives this process. This team has grown since last year's visit. The inspectors were informed that members of the team are in the process of completing Personal Education Plans for the relevant young people. The manager of this team also participates in the fostering panel. Records of achievement and exclusion are maintained. The position of children without school placements is reviewed monthly at joint education and social services meetings. The inspectors attended a meeting of foster carers at which they were provided with additional information and advice in relation to educational achievement. A range of resources such as worksheets and books is made available by the educational support team.

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

The foster carer handbook now contains a section explaining the role of the 16+ team. However, the inspectors recommend that foster carers are provided with more detailed information in relation to preparation for adulthood. It is clear from conversations with carers and young people that carers do enable young people to develop some daily living skills within the family. Pathway plans were also made available to demonstrate that there is planning in this respect. All young people of a suitable age are referred to the 16+ team and are allocated a worker. Young people have expressed dissatisfaction with this system as they find it difficult to engage with a new worker at this important and stressful time of their life. The inspectors were informed that members of the 16+ team plan to deliver training to foster carers in relation to preparation for independence.

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?

3

There is a written procedure for the recruitment and selection of staff and all staff are required to undergo training in fair and effective recruitment before they can participate in the selection process. The staff files demonstrated that the departmental policy is followed and that only staff with appropriate qualifications are appointed. The manager reports that references are followed up by telephone calls. Examination of the staff files revealed that checks and references are confirmed against a checklist. Personnel staff confirmed that new entrants are checked through the Criminal Records Bureau and that repeat checks are planned for every three years. There is now a system to ensure that staff appointed prior to the establishment of the CRB are scheduled for repeat checks.

Total number of staff of the agency:

X

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

X

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 is a clear management structure with well defined lines of accountability, but, as has been mentioned earlier in this report, the manager of the fostering service does not currently have responsibility over the workers who arrange and monitor the long term and kinship placements. The service has systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads and to assign tasks to appropriate members of staff. All workers have job descriptions and access to relevant policies and procedures. There are systems to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed and implemented effectively. Staff and carers undertake ongoing training and skills development. There is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support and procedures for dealing with enquiries from prospective carers. It is acknowledged that this will need to be increased to service the new posts which are expected soon. The service has access to its own advisors in relation to childcare, medical and educational matters. Fostering social workers displayed a good understanding of their role. It may be useful for some joint training to take place between area and fostering social workers or for the induction process in each team to include short placements in other teams, in order for each to gain a better understanding of their role in the fostering process.

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**

The fostering team consists of 7 social workers, 2 senior practitioners, 1 support staff and 2 administrative staff. All staff have qualifications which are appropriate to their role. There is a cover system to provide professional and managerial support when the manager is absent. The team is considered by the inspectors to be adequate to meet the work of the service, when all posts are filled. The two current vacancies will shortly be advertised and the team will be expanded to include three new workers to carry out the extra work created by the assimilation of the long-term and kinship fostering cases. The manager reports that the service has a well-organised, annual recruitment of carers in addition to periodic enquiries. The inspectors were present a meeting with foster carers to plan a fostering 'fun day' with the aim of recruiting new carers. Staff report that they are able to manage the volume of assessments of new carers, when fully staffed, and sessional workers are employed for this purpose when there are shortages in capacity. The team has been short of workers during the past year, due to sickness, maternity leave and vacancies. Use has been made of locum workers to carry out assessments, during this period. This shortage has had an impact on the ability of workers to undertake all monthly supervision visits to carers and also on the level of supervision of workers in the team. However, carers reported a good level of support, even though they were aware that the team was under pressure. The manager also has an 'open door' policy and is available for unplanned supervision of staff at all times.

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**

The service follows Dudley MBC's employment practices and these are based on principles of equal opportunities. The foster carers' handbook specifies 'out of hours' support systems for carers, which include a 24-hour advice service from members of the fostering team. The issue of emergency, 'out of hours' referrals was discussed. These referrals are received by the Emergency Duty Team workers, who then contact the identified 'on-call' fostering service worker. Fostering workers questioned the need for them to be contacted in all cases, as the Emergency Duty Team are provided with regular information about the service. Foster carers also raised the issue of 'out of hours' support. The fostering service workers are accessed in these events through a third party. Examples were provided of when this service had been less than satisfactory. The inspectors recommend that the manager should review the arrangements for 'out of hours' support and contact.

Supervision is provided monthly to carers and to staff on a 4-6 weekly basis, in addition to annual reviews/appraisals at which future training and development needs are identified. At this year's visit, the inspectors found that foster carers displayed a clearer appreciation of the role of the fostering social worker as supervisor. Insurance and Health and Safety needs are clearly outlined in the Foster carers' handbook and these are checked annually. The department has a 'Whistle Blowing' policy for staff and has now devised a policy for carers.

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?****0**

This standard was not assessed at this visit.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The manager plans to supervise all staff on a 4-6 weekly basis. These sessions are recorded and filed. The manager also includes senior practitioners in supervisory duties in order to enhance the level of supervision available to staff. Due to the pressure of work and the shortages of staff during the past year, some sessions have been missed. However, the manager also has an 'open door' policy and is available for unplanned supervision of staff at all times. Staff are able to attend monthly staff meetings in addition to the weekly allocation meetings. They confirmed that they receive a good level of support.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The foster carers' handbook and the Statement of Purpose detail the processes and avenues of support available for foster carers. The role of the carer and that of the supervising social worker are clearly defined in the literature and this is understood. The manager oversees this process and issues which cannot be resolved through this process are raised at panel. Annual review reports are prepared and made available to the panel. Fostering staff attend meetings with carers in order to discuss issues and provide support. Conversations with staff and examination of documents revealed that there is no clear, written information in relation to the provision of respite care. The inspectors recommend to the manager that this should be developed.

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?****0**

This standard was not assessed at this visit.

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?****0**

This standard was not fully assessed at this visit. However, the inspectors noted that the service is now using 'Skills to Foster', for its initial training of foster carers, in conjunction with other Black Country Consortium authorities. The possibilities of obtaining the services of a designated training officer are being explored. The inspectors saw the programme of training in relation to child protection which, it is planned, all carers will attend. Carers raised the issue of the timing of training courses, which are sometimes inconvenient, and this is being explored by the service.

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?	2
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The policies and procedures and the foster carer handbook detail the information which should be held on each child by the service. LAC forms should be completed appropriately and foster carers should be provided with sufficient information to be able to provide an appropriate service to each child. Whilst some improvement was noted since last year's inspection, the inspectors found that there are still gaps on recordings and missing LAC forms which should be provided by the area social workers. Carers were found to maintain more detailed information once the child was in placement. It is acknowledged that, in the case of emergency placements, the social workers will not have access to all the relevant information. However, greater efforts should be made to ensure that the area social workers supply the necessary information at the time of referral or as soon as possible afterwards.

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?**

2

Confidential records are maintained on carers and these are held securely. Some of the information in relation to young people placed was unavailable and the inspectors found it difficult on occasions to ascertain which children were still in placement from examining the files. Electronic records are also maintained and these are more up to date in relation to placements, but if two systems are used, there must be a means of ensuring that they both show the same data. Staff reported some difficulties with the IT systems used.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

299

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

277

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

240

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

13

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

7

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

108.50

Maximum £

546.28

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Conversations and observations revealed that the premises currently used to house the fostering service are not adequate for the purpose. Staff work in overcrowded conditions and, with the imminent increase in staffing levels, more pressure will be placed on space and equipment. The inspectors were informed that discussions are being held in order to explore the possibilities of moving to larger premises. However, these are in the early stages. There is a secure entrance and there are lockable cabinets for the storage of information. There is limited parking at this location. There is access for wheelchair users to the ground floor of the building.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed at this visit.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed at this visit.

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?

0

This standard was not assessed at this visit.

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?	3
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There are procedures which cover the composition and conduct of the fostering panel. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out on panel members. The independent panel members include people with expertise in education and health. There are two foster carers from other Local Authority Fostering Services on the panel. The panel was observed to carry out its function appropriately and to be suitable composed. There are procedures which cover decision making when not all of the panel members are in agreement. The panel also fulfils a quality assurance role and reports back to the fostering service and area offices on issues of procedure and practice. A decision has recently been made to make use of the services of an independent person to chair the panel and the new chair will take up appointment in the near future.

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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This standard is not applicable. The services of an independent provider are used.	
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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?	2
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Family and friends as carers are managed within the field social work teams. They are assessed and supported by field social workers and their approval is required by panel. The assessment process is the same as that for other carers. The inspectors were unable to confirm that kinship carers were receiving supervision, appraisal and training at an equivalent level to other carers. However, as mentioned previously in this report, a post is being advertised to enable this function to be brought within the main service. The inspectors look forward to assessing the impact of this development at the next inspection.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

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 12th February 2005 of Dudley LA Fostering and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

- Amendments to the report were necessary
- Comments were received from the provider
- Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report
- 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

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by (Please see attached letter), which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

- Action plan was required YES
- Action plan was received at the point of publication YES
- Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion YES
- Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion
- Provider has declined to provide an action plan
- Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of Dudley LA Fostering 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 Dudley LA Fostering 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.

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