



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Wiltshire County Council Fostering Service

**County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8LE**

Lead Inspector
Sam Chisholm

Key Announced Inspection
24th January 2007 12:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *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

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Wiltshire County Council Fostering Service
Address	County Hall Bythesea Road Trowbridge Wiltshire BA14 8LE
Telephone number	01225 713000
Fax number	
Email address	shannonclarke@wiltshire.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Wiltshire County Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 7th November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Fostering Service is part of the Children and Education Department within Wiltshire County Council. Fostering services are provided by the three family placement area teams and via the Family Support Disabled Children Team.

The Family Placement Teams are responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and supervision of foster carers and adopters. They deal with placement requests from fieldwork colleagues, matching individual needs, as far as possible. The teams provide a duty service to respond to emergency placement requests during office hours. Family Placement Officers generally do not hold specialised roles in terms of fostering or adoption, although some staff members have developed specialist expertise in particular areas of work.

The Family Support Disabled Children Team provides short-break foster carers across the county. This team is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and supervision of these carers and deal with all referrals for short break services for disabled children

SUMMARY

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

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors. Evidence was gathered through questionnaire feedback, discussions with and visits to staff, carers and children, scrutiny of records and observation of panel and support meetings.

What the service does well:

The service provided to children in South Wiltshire by the Looked After Children's Nurse is excellent.

The service has carers who are very well supported and receive good training opportunities to provide a good level of care to foster children.

The fostering panel is organised efficiently and effectively and carries out its functions in a thorough and democratic manner.

The service showed a strong commitment to valuing diversity and meeting the specific needs of children.

The Short Break service is well run and provides good quality respite care for disabled children.

The service has excellent systems in place for consulting children and is commended for its practice in this area.

Kinship carers receive thorough assessments and good levels of support, training and supervision.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service had been given a number of requirements and recommendations at the last inspection which it has now met.

What they could do better:

Requirements have been made in relation to staff files and children's case records.

Recommendations have been made in relation to health service provision, education monitoring, carer support information, allegation investigation processes and unqualified staff supervision frequency.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service has good systems in place to promote the health and development of children.

The service provided to children in South Wiltshire by the Looked After Children's Nurse is excellent and it is recommended that this be extended to all of the children in foster care in the area covered by the Local Authority.

EVIDENCE:

All of the children's files seen, contained appropriate health information and health assessments. Carers confirmed that they receive sufficient information about children's health needs.

The area covered by the local authority was formerly split between two primary care trusts (PCT). Since October 2006 there has been one PCT for Wiltshire, but the service received by looked after children continues to differ according to which part of Wiltshire they live in. the PCT is currently considering employing a designated nurse for vulnerable children, including those Looked After.

Currently, a Looked After Children's (LAC) Nurse is employed for South Wiltshire. She carries out Health Assessment reviews for school age children in their own homes at times convenient for them. A paediatrician carries out initial Health Assessments and they jointly produce a health care plan for each child. Health visitors contribute to those for pre-school children.

The health care plan and medical advisor summary are sent to the child's social worker and GP, and a copy of the health care plan is also sent to carers, parents, health visitors, children over 11 years old and the independent reviewing officers.

The LAC nurse provides advice on drugs awareness and other health promotion issues as part of the health assessments. She also gives sexual health advice and enrolls young people on the 'no worries' free condoms scheme. Carers and children have her contact details if they need her.

The LAC nurse was about to start a group for young women on self esteem and sexual health at the time of the inspection. She also reported that she was able to do specific work with young people around issues such as behaviour problems.

For the rest of Wiltshire, a community paediatrician carries out the health assessments or asks community doctors to do this. Some doctors send out consultant letters rather than health care plans.

Looked after children can be referred to community dental services if they don't have their own. A referral system exists for accessing mental health services and a local specialist drug and alcohol service can also help looked after children.

The foster carers' handbook contained comprehensive information on health related matters including registering with health services, health promotion, assessments and reviews, special needs and disabilities, manual handling and intimate care.

The training plan for carers included first aid and a wide variety of other health related courses. Records showed that these courses had been well attended.

Carers looking after disabled children are trained in specific health care tasks by a nurse and given a certificate verifying their ability to carry these out. Examples of these were seen signed and dated by the nurse and carer with a clear list of the tasks performed.

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.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service has suitable staff recruitment and selection procedures in place. Recruitment records were generally satisfactory, but need to include proof of identity.

The service has suitable carers who are appropriately trained and supported to provide a good level of care to their foster children.

Good systems are in place to secure the best possible matches between children and carers. The new looked after children (LAC) forms need to be checked for compliance with the standards and regulations as detailed below.

The service has generally good systems in place to minimise the risk of abuse and neglect of children. The recent allegation investigation needs to be reviewed as planned to inform future practice and improve the time taken to complete the investigation process.

The family placement teams are suitably staffed. Team managers need to ensure that unqualified staff receive formal supervision at least monthly and keep records of this.

The fostering panel is organised efficiently and effectively and carries out its functions in a thorough and democratic manner. All panel members' files must contain records of references.

EVIDENCE:

Five staff recruitment files were seen. These contained appropriate records of references and police CRB checks. The human resources team have a system for renewing CRB checks.

The carers visited provided a good standard of care and accommodation. Their homes were comfortable, clean and well decorated and maintained. The children confirmed that they were well cared for and supported and had everything they needed.

Carers are provided with training and information about health and safety issues. Carers' files included health and safety checklists that also form part of their annual review.

The family placement duty officers now have brief profiles of the carers on their database to use for matching when needed. They use the referral forms they receive from the children's teams to inform the initial matching process. The referral form contained a good level of information.

Following referral, further discussions take place between the children's social workers, family placement staff and carers to decide on potential placements. Following this, introductory visits are arranged if the placement is a planned one.

A placement agreement meeting is then held to ensure that the child's needs will be met. The family placement team staff then visit within the first week to check that carers have all of the information they need and that the placement plan has been acted upon.

Feedback from carers and records on children's files showed that carers had been provided with appropriate information about the children.

Children and carers were generally satisfied with the matching process.

The service now has a suitable system for monitoring the distance of placements from the child's family home.

Where exemptions are made in placing children who fall outside of a carer's approval categories, decisions are initially made by the service manager or

head of placement services and then presented at the next available panel meeting. The form used for this was satisfactory but the written procedure needs to be revised to clarify that the family placement team manager doesn't make decisions about exemptions.

A new system for completing LAC forms was being introduced at the time of the inspection. As the service uses Placement Plan part 1 as their placement agreement, they need to check that the new forms meet the requirements of the standards and regulations.

The training plan and records for carers showed that they receive training in safer caring, child protection and other related issues.

Carer's files contained individual safer care policies. These are revised where necessary for new placements.

The foster care agreements and carers' handbook both contained statements about corporal punishment.

The local authority has a contract with the NSPCC to carry out all section 47 investigations into allegations of abuse within foster care. One allegation had been made since the last inspection. The records of this showed that although the service (in collaboration with the police and NSPCC) generally followed an appropriate procedure for investigation, the process took too long. This had already been acknowledged by the service and it is recommended that they review the case and procedures as planned.

The carers' handbook contained a good level of information about bullying and feedback from children indicated that they had not experienced problems in this area.

Recruitment files for 5 staff showed that the service follows appropriate recruitment and selection procedures. The files were checked against the regulations and contained all necessary records apart from proof of identification. This needs to be kept on file.

The family placement teams are mostly staffed by qualified, experienced social workers who carry out the assessments of carers and most of their supervision visits. The service does however also employ four support workers, whose initial support role has now been extended to supervising some of the carers. This decision was taken because of the quality of relevant experience that the support workers brought with them from previous posts.

Thorough discussions with managers, staff and carers showed that these workers were providing a good level of support to carers. They are supervised both by team managers and through co-working with qualified colleagues. Managers confirmed that they supervise these workers more closely.

The supervision records for the workers were seen. These showed that they generally received formal supervision monthly. However, two of the records showed gaps of more than a month that could not be adequately explained. The support workers must receive formal supervision at least monthly and the records kept to evidence this.

The fostering panel was observed as part of this inspection. The panel has an appropriate membership and was seen to carry out its functions in a thorough and democratic way.

Recruitment files were seen for panel members. These were generally satisfactory apart from references missing from one members' file. The service must ensure that records of all checks and references are kept on file.

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.

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

7, 13 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service showed a strong commitment to valuing diversity and meeting the specific needs of children.

Good improvements had been made in monitoring educational achievements and carers were strong advocates in this area. The planned system for monitoring attendance levels needs to be implemented without delay.

The Short Break service is well run and provides good quality respite care for disabled children.

EVIDENCE:

The service showed a strong commitment to valuing diversity. The recruitment social workers were focussing on recruiting carers from a range of ethnicities and with specific skills to meet the needs of the children they place. Records showed that children's specific needs were being identified and efforts made to meet them. The VOICE service and Viewpoint software enabled children to make their views known. The independent visitors service for looked after children had produced its information in Farsi to make it accessible to Afghani and Iraqi refugees. In addition, staff used translators when

needed to ensure that they could communicate effectively with parents and children who could not communicate in English.

The service had worked closely with education welfare officers and schools to improve the educational achievement of fostered children. Records showed a good level of information and planning around education and all of the children's files seen contained personal education plans.

Good systems were seen for monitoring exclusions and supporting carers in promoting the educational achievement of children.

The service had not been able to effectively monitor attendance as most schools were not providing sufficient information. A new electronic system was due to be trialled and it is recommended that this is set up without delay.

Feedback from children indicated that they were happy with the level of educational support they were receiving and most of those interviewed had positive educational aspirations for themselves.

Discussions with carers revealed that they were strong advocates for children in helping them obtain the type of education they needed and wanted.

The Short Break scheme is currently staffed by two social workers, one of whom is the team leader and supervisor of the other. They are currently part of the disabled children's service. At the time of the inspection, the local authority had planned to change this arrangement from April 2007, so that the two posts would be located within the family placement service and managed by a family placement team manager.

Records seen for the service showed that carers were well trained and supported, staff were appropriately experienced, qualified and supervised and children appropriately matched with carers who could meet their needs. Carers reported feeling very well supported.

Carers in this scheme are now subject to unannounced visits and where they do not receive monthly supervision due to the frequency of placements, the reasons are recorded and agreed by a manager.

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.

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

10 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service promotes appropriate contact arrangements between children and their families.

The service has excellent systems in place for consulting children and is commended for its practice in this area.

EVIDENCE:

The children's files contained details of contact arrangements and records of contact visits. The young people spoken to confirmed that they had contact with their families and were generally happy with the arrangements made.

The service uses a Children's Rights officer to promote consultation with children and young people. The officer is employed by the local authority, but is independent from the service. The officer runs a service called Voice that provides advocacy and consultation support services. Information leaflets about the service had been produced for children and carers. Voice have contracts with children which also serve as a record of what work has been done with their advocate.

In addition to advocacy support, Voice ensures that the Total Respect programme is run and that young people are supported with this. A quarterly

newsletter is also sent to children. A recent one included a report on the annual awards ceremony for looked after children and an interview with the children's director conducted by some of the children.

The children's rights officer is currently involved with a multi-agency working group looking at improving involvement of children and young people in the services they use. They plan to include young people in staff recruitment.

The service uses excellent software called Viewpoint to enable children to make comments for their LAC reviews. This system comes in five different versions for different age groups and children who are disabled. The software enables children to choose a character to help them. The character asks them questions as well as the questions appearing on screen. There is also a texting box that be used to add additional comments. The complete online questionnaires can then be used by reviewing officers and for collecting statistics. The system was seen to be very child friendly and easy to use for those less able to read and write.

Voice staff also use a Listen Up pack to help young and disabled children to give their views and make complaints.

The service has a children's guide which uses a child friendly format. Children also receive a leaflet about how to complain, which includes contact details for the Commission and Voice. Feedback from children revealed that they felt well consulted and knew how to make complaints.

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):

29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service has good systems in place for paying allowances and expenses to carers.

EVIDENCE:

A record of the current fostering allowances was seen. These are graded according to the age of the children and the skill level of the carers. Carers said that they were happy with this system.

Information for carers included how they would be paid, what the payments cover and expenses that can be claimed and a statement about insurance cover. The information was clear and comprehensive.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service has an appropriate statement of aims and objectives.

There are an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff who are organised and managed effectively. Prospective carers are appropriately assessed.

Carers are very well supported and receive good training opportunities. The carers' handbook contains clear, detailed information about the support available, but needs to include more detail on complaints and respite care and amended information on out of hours support.

Children's case files and other administrative records were generally of a good standard. Children's records need to include Essential Information part 2 and two young people required Pathway Plans.

Kinship carers receive thorough assessments and good levels of support, training and supervision.

EVIDENCE:

The service has an appropriate statement of aims and objectives.

Discussions with staff showed that there are clear management and delegation structures in place. Staff reported that they were happy with the amount and type of work they were doing. Staff files showed that they receive appropriate levels of supervision and appraisal and have accurate contracts and job descriptions. The job descriptions for support workers had been revised to reflect their additional supervisory responsibilities.

Both managers and staff felt that teams were sufficiently well staffed and that caseloads were manageable. Staff felt well supported by their colleagues and managers, and were happy with the training opportunities available to them.

Each of the three family placement teams has a social worker specialising in carer recruitment and one of the team managers oversees this. These staff reported that they had concentrated on recruiting skilled carers for the fee paid scheme with some success. They also have strategies to recruit carers from ethnic minorities and carers for children with disabilities. They felt that the increased payments available to carers had helped with recruitment. They are currently focussing on improving the support groups and encouraging a buddying system for new carers.

The service used an appropriate method for assessing potential carers. Records of these were seen on carers' files.

The service was seen to have a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. The information in the carers' handbook included clear and detailed

information about most of the areas identified in standard 21. the section on out of hours support needs to be updated to reflect current practice. More detail is needed about the complaints process and information about respite care needs to be included.

Feedback from carers indicated that they felt they received very good support and training opportunities from the family placement teams.

Plans and records showed that they attended a wide range of courses relevant to their roles.

Carers have access to several support groups. Observation of one of these showed that carers were receiving useful support from the co-ordinator and other carers.

The children's case files were generally of a good standard, including clear, detailed information and most of the LAC forms. Four of the files did not contain essential information part 2 and two young people needed pathway plans. Most carers were happy with the information they had received about their foster children.

A good level of guidance was seen in the carers' handbook on ways to support life story work.

Overall the administrative records for the service were in good order apart from where otherwise specified in this report.

Assessment processes for kinship carers were robust and well organised.

Kinship carers are invited to attend the Skills to Foster course and the same ongoing training as other carers. They also receive the same level of support and supervision as other carers. Records were seen to evidence this.

Kinship carers interviewed were happy with the level of support and training they had received.

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	3

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

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	4

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

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, 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.	FS15	Schedule 1	Staff files need to include proof of identity.	16/02/07
2.	FS30	Schedule 1	All panel members' files must contain records of references.	16/02/07
3.	FS24	17	Children's records need to include Essential Information part 2 and two young people require Pathway Plans.	16/02/07

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.	FS12	It is recommended that the LAC nurse service be extended to all of the children in foster care in the area covered by the Local Authority.
2.	FS9	The recent allegation investigation needs to be reviewed as planned to inform future practice and improve the time taken to complete the investigation process.

3.	FS15	Team managers need to ensure that unqualified staff receive formal supervision at least monthly and keep records of this.
4.	FS13	The planned system for monitoring school attendance levels needs to be implemented without delay.
5.	FS21	The carers' handbook needs to include more detail on complaints and respite care and amended information on out of hours support.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Bristol North LO
300 Aztec West
Almondsbury
South Glos
BS32 4RG

National Enquiry Line

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI