



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Warwickshire CC Fostering and Adoption  
Development Team**

**Faraday Hall  
Lower Hillmorton Road  
Rugby  
Warwickshire  
CV21 3TU**

*Lead Inspector*  
Warren Clarke

*Key Announced Inspection*  
20th November 2006      09:30

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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://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](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

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<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Brenda Vincent
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection** 17th October 2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

Warwickshire Fostering Service provides accommodation and care for children and young people who are being looked after, either temporarily or on a long-term basis, by the local authority. The service caters for children and young people aged 0 - 18 years of either gender. It makes available a wide range of foster carers in order to respond to the varying needs of those requiring a service.

Within Warwickshire County Council Social Services Department, the Principal Operations Manager, Brenda Vincent, has strategic lead responsibility for the Fostering Service. She is based in the Fostering and Adoption Development Team in Rugby.

There are five district fostering teams operating in each of the geographical areas of Warwickshire. There is a sixth Central Fostering Services Team, based in Rugby, responsible for the marketing, recruitment, preparation and training of foster carers. There is a Foster Care NVQ Centre offering the NVQ 3 in Caring for Children and Young People.

The Emergency Duty Team maintains specific carers who can provide emergency out of hours very short-term placements. These teams support the recruitment and preparation of foster carers, assess prospective foster carers, make placement matches and provide ongoing support.

The service is supported by a Foster Care Development Officer.

There is a Fostering Panel that meets twice a month, once in the north and once in the south of the county. The Assistant Head of Children's Services (Safeguarding Children, Quality Assurance and Service Development) chairs this panel.

Warwickshire has developed partnership arrangements with Barnardo's for a remand and Short Term Emergency Placements service (STEPS). Warwickshire also has a 'preferred provider' arrangement with Pathways Care Ltd. The fostering service provides a fostering service to all looked after children within Warwickshire's boundaries.

For recruitment purposes, foster carers are defined in the following categories: mainstream, family and friends, family link and parent and baby placements. In addition there are special emergency duty foster carers and those who provide permanent, long term, shared and short break care. The fostering service provides a designated social worker to foster carers, who also have access to the complaints and representations system and to the Children's Rights Service. The foster care service recruits, assesses, approves, trains, reviews and supports its carers. There is a Payment for Skills Scheme, respite, and sessional support for carers and a sitting service.

# SUMMARY

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

This key inspection was conducted on an announced basis. It was undertaken alongside that of the adoption service over a consecutive period of five days. During the inspection, an elected member of the council with cabinet responsibility for children's services was interviewed, as were a relevant senior manager, the manager for the fostering service and social work staff involved in supporting care and those with case responsibility for some of the children and young people.

A sample of children and young people was selected for case tracking, i.e., close examination of how they are being cared for in relation to the national minimum standards and regulations. The inspector made visits to the foster homes where they are accommodated and in all cases interviewed their foster carers, conducted a light touch inspection of the households and spoke with the children where they were present or consented. In the weeks before the inspection, the inspector was invited to a foster carers support group meeting and a consultation event for children under 8 years. This event was to use activities to find out their views about how they believe they are cared for against the five national outcome areas for children. Note, the main heading first five sections of the main body of this report reflects those outcomes.

## **What the service does well:**

Arrangements that are made to keep the children and young people safe and the efforts made to find out and, as necessary, act on what they think about the quality of their care are outstanding. The aspects of the Service, which are concerned with its promotion, recruitment of carers and their training and development presents as well organised and effective.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

The complete staffing for the Short Break Scheme for disabled children is now in place and therefore the full range of service, including unannounced visits to the carers involved, is now being provided. In the inspector's opinion, the process by which children and young people are matched with foster carers is much clearer even though in some instances there is little choice of carers. This means, however, that where a match is not ideal the gaps can be identified and measures taken to compensate.

## **What they could do better:**

As stated above, the fostering service meets all of the minimum standards against which it has been assessed and in some instances exceeds them. Six recommendations have been made to address areas where further improvements ought to be made. The most important of these is to redouble efforts to recruit more foster carers so that there is greater choice of foster carers particularly for those aged 12 and above. The fostering service has already identified this as an area for improvement in its development plan.

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](mailto: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.

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# Being Healthy

## The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

## The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

### JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent** The Local Authority's corporate parenting strategy, resources and practices on the ground provides a reasonable guarantee that the health and wellbeing of children and young people in its foster care will be properly promoted and where needs are identified in this connection, they will be addressed.

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

### EVIDENCE:

In considering how the fostering service performs its function to promote children and young people's health and, as necessary, respond to their assessed needs in this regard, an evaluation was made both in terms of its strategy and the effectiveness of this in practice. It was noted from examination of a number of policy and procedure documents that the Local Authority has established a comprehensive and integrated health system for the children and young people that it looks after. This is mostly for children and young people in foster care since it forms the principal provision for those being looked after by the Local Authority. The system, referred to as the Health of Looked After Children (HLAC), includes the services of doctor specialising in child health and two nurses. There are also Children and Adolescent Mental Health service and other services such as for those with Sexually Inappropriate Behaviour (SIBS), which respond to children's emotional and behavioural difficulties.

In essence, there are policies and procedures in place that dictate that children in foster care should have health surveillance medicals at the start of their care episode and at specified intervals thereafter. This includes clear guidance about infants for whom it is necessary to monitor their health and development more frequently. Aligned to these policies and procedures is the general foster carers undertaking, set out the Foster Carer Agreement, to promote the health

and well being of the children placed with them, and to attend to any specific health needs as might be dictated by the Placement Agreement for each child. All these measures, which include foster carer reporting any illnesses that the children develop, are intended to ensure that children and young people are maintained in good health and that where relevant they receive any treatment they need. The children records, a sample of which was examined, showed that their health is a major feature in the process of the statutory review of their case.

When interviewed foster carers said the system works effectively. They said that they are given adequate information about the children and young people's health and are able to access primary health services for them without difficulty. Accordingly, there was evidence in the children records kept by foster carers and those retained by the fostering service to show that the children and young people were receiving preventative and curative health care. This includes medicals, dental and optical examinations. There were also foster carers contemporaneous notes of any illnesses or injuries that the children have while in their care. These notes and the fostering service's monitoring records were in line with information given to the Commission since the last inspection and detailed the more serious illness or accidents that children and young people have sustained. For example, between 10/10/05 and 19/8/06 there were 10 instances where children received hospital care. Half of those cases were where children received A&E treatment and were discharged on the same day. The others were related to hospital admissions for treatment of existing or new health condition. That only ten children/young people of the Local Authority's foster care population of 258 (at September 2006) needed hospital treatment during the aforementioned period is indicative of the good health that they enjoy

Children and young people's views on this aspect of their care were sought from different means. In a questionnaire administered as part of this inspection, those who responded (a small sample) said that they always get support and advice from their foster carers about being healthy. This included additional comments such as "Any concerns I have I am able to ask or express them". This concurs with the outcomes reported by the Local Authority's own children and young people's consultation events where views were sought on its performance in the five national outcomes for the care of children, which forms the first five headings of this report. In the consultation event for children under 8 years, part of which the inspector attended as a precursor to this inspection, imaginative activities were used to elicit the children's views about aspect of their care. In regard to their health, the children indicated that their foster carers encouraged them to stay healthy. They cited examples such as getting plenty of exercise, eating fruit and vegetables and going to the dentist as being among the ways in which they are encouraged to stay healthy.

A similar event in February 2006, which was targeted at older children revealed similar findings to those outlined above. The older children were

aware of benefits of their five daily portions of fruit and vegetables and that their foster carers encouraged healthy eating. They also understood the need for their periodic health checks and, encouragingly, were aware of the things widely promoted as endangering good health such as alcohol, tobacco and poor diet.

That the children and young people consider that their health is being looked after and that they are being encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles is confirmation that the Local Authority's children's health strategy has been effectively implemented. It also shows that the investment in providing training and resource packs for foster carers in this area, is also paying off. Those children and young people who were seen during the course of the inspection appeared to be in robust health, alert and vibrant.

# 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):

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

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

Children and young people being looked after in the Local Authority's fostering service benefit from a system that takes reasonable care to protect them from abuse and neglect and are assured an efficient and effective response to any actual or potential harm that emerges in this regard.

### EVIDENCE:

Assessment of how effectively the fostering service acts to keep children and young people in its care safe was made in relation to the six key standards shown above and resulted in the following evidence and conclusions: -

The person managing the fostering service remains the same as was the case at the last inspection, though a change is planned in the near future. As was established then, the fostering service manager is deemed competent since this inspection has shown the service to be run so as to achieve the desirable outcomes for children and young people as the evidence throughout the report shows. Examination of the manager's records also confirms that this person has been properly vetted as suitable to act in this capacity in terms of Criminal Records Bureau disclosure, references and declared qualifications and their authentication.

The fostering service has adopted nationally recognised assessment standards i.e., the Fostering Network A10 framework, for determining the suitability of its foster carers and their households. This was seen to be the case from examination of foster carers' records, which both detail their assessment and the process of their approval and subsequent annual review. The inspector visited a sample of foster homes and in all instances they were deemed safe and materially comfortable. It was clear from the records and interview of foster carers and their supervising social workers, that particular emphasis is placed on home safety and, in this regard, evidence was provided of a detailed checklist which is used to ensure that the foster carers homes are safe settings for children and young people. This takes account of any risks that animals being kept as pets might pose.

Among the measures taken to ensure the children and young people's safety in the foster homes were those to prevent accidents and to minimise risk of abuse or feelings of discomfort. In this connection, equipment such as stair gates and fireguards are used where infants are being accommodated and each foster care household is required to have an agreed procedure for the event of fire. On the evidence that the inspector saw in relation to check of driving licence, motor insurance, MOT and guidance given on the use of car seats, it was concluded that reasonable steps are being taken to ensure that children in foster care are kept safe when transported by their foster carers. It was also noted that each household also has an agreed Safe Care procedure, which is intended to minimise abuse and discomfort for children and carers.

As dictated by the national minimum standards, the fostering service ensures that each child/young person has his or her own bed and in most cases children and young people have their own bedroom. Where children are likely to be sharing a bedroom risk factors are taken into account in the matching process. It was also observed that guidance is given by the Sexual Inappropriate Behaviour Service (SIBS) team and other specialists where children with known risky behaviour are to be placed in foster homes where there are other children. This also applies to Friends and Family carers particularly where child protection has featured in the case.

Three young people who were interviewed at their foster home when asked for their views about the safety, facilities and comfort of their foster home, said that they were satisfied on all counts. They confirmed that they had their own bedrooms, which they permitted the inspector to see and which were found to be well equipped and adorned with paraphernalia that typifies their age interests, i.e., TV, posters, electronic games systems, etc.

At the last inspection recommendations were made to encourage tightening up of the matching process. That is, to show more clearly the reasoning for placing children with particular foster carers, to highlight instances where the match between the carers' resources and the child's needs and interests might

not be ideally compatible and the measures to be taken to compensate in these circumstances. On this occasion, both the children and foster carers' records revealed significant improvements in this regard. There is a creditable matching matrix, which takes account of issues such as location, ethnicity, religion/culture and other factors based on the children's needs within the five national outcome areas earlier mentioned. The matrix is being used by the social workers as an aid to determining the match between children and carers and is proving effective. However, information derived from this process needs to be reflected in the Placement Agreement and foster carers ought to be informed of the assumptions that informed the matching/placement decision and to be clear about what compensatory assistance they will receive for any shortfalls identified in the matching process. Foster carers who were interviewed in the case tracking process had not been given a copy of the completed matching matrix and the Placement Agreements, which were examined, did not highlight any links between their contents and the aforementioned process.

In discussions with social workers of the children and carers in the sample selected for case tracking, they said they were satisfied with the system for matching children with carers. They nevertheless recognised that mostly the numbers of foster carers available meant that there is little or no choice and therefore the matching process is rendered academic. This was confirmed to be the case more so for teenagers for whom there is a shortage of carers and a situation exacerbated by unaccompanied children and young people seeking asylum whose numbers cannot be accurately projected and planned for. In response to this, the Operational Manager (Central Services) who has lead responsibility for foster care marketing and recruitment advised the inspector of the improvement plan (2006/07) to recruit more carers interested and equipped to accommodate children over 12 years old.

The Local Authority has established a Safeguarding Children Board and is currently working effectively to hone its services mechanisms to make its corporate parenting responsibilities towards Looked After children (includes those in foster care) evident. A councillor with Lead Member responsibility for the Children and Families Directorate who met with the inspectors explained the range of initiatives including the County's Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, all of which is intended to demonstrate civic and service consensus and commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of Looked After children.

Within the fostering service it was observed that the Child protection procedures of the local Children's Safeguarding Board have been adopted. Copies of these procedures were seen in the offices of the central fostering service and in one of the area offices, which the inspector visited. Through the system of notification of child protection concerns affecting children in foster care, the inspector has been provided with evidence of instances where the

procedures have been invoked and have resulted in effective actions being taken to protect children when appropriate.

The inspector was provided with evidence of a number of steps, which have been taken to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect. These include giving foster carers clear guidance and training in how it expects them to approach the children's care. For example the nature and impact of child abuse features in their preparation training. This together with how to care for those who have experienced abuse also forms part of carers ongoing training. There is, as mentioned earlier, a safe caring policy for each foster home and acceptable means of behaviour management without resort to unacceptable punishment. The fostering service also makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not permitted, and under its corporate anti bullying initiative has provided training and other resources to both prevent bullying and to support children who might experience it. The inspector was, during the inspection, able to observe foster carers receiving training in this regard.

In assessing the fostering service's system for assuring the suitability of those it employs to work with children and young people, the inspector was satisfied that due care is being taken in this connection. That is, there is a clear procedure for both assessing potential employees' competence for their particular posts and a rigorous vetting process for establishing that the character of those to whom posts are to be offered is compatible with promoting the safety of children and young people. In this regard it was noted that references, in which the authors are specially requested to comment on candidates' suitability to work with children and young people, are taken up. This also applies to the verity of claims that candidates make about their qualifications, professional affiliations and employment history.

Owing to illness, the inspector was not able to observe the fostering panel in session as arranged, but was able to assess its constitution and operation from records, other documentation and interview with the decision-maker and the manager. From these sources it was established that the panel is properly constituted and, from minutes of its meetings, that it is always quorate. The manager advised of some expected changes to its membership in the near future including inclusion of a young person who has previously been in foster care or a parent of such a child or young person.

Social workers, both those with case responsibility for the children who are placed and those who supervise foster carers, had no concerns about the operational effectiveness of the panel. The Assistant Director with responsibility for children in need, acts as the Local Authority's decision maker and when interviewed explained that another senior officer of similar status chairs the panel. It was observed from the records that the Vice Chair of the panel is also employed within the Local Authority's Children and Families Directorate, but is not directly concerned in the assessment, support and

supervision of foster carers. The decision maker, who has extensive experience in child care confirmed that the assessment, approval and review of foster carers process continues to be effective. The inspector also observed from the relevant documentation that there is a clear and acceptable process by which the fostering panel considers foster carers who are presented for approval and review, including inviting them to appear at such meetings.

Evidence was provided during the inspection of a procedure for dealing with disputes or representations made in regard to the process for approval of and, as appropriate, disciplinary process for foster carers. This was confirmed by the records in a sample in which the inspector noted that prospective foster carers are rigorously assessed, reviewed and where relevant are held to account for any failure to meet the fostering services expectations in the care of the children and young people. It was observed from the records that the fostering panel is discharging its quality assurance functions effectively. For example, it identifies any gaps in assessment information and probes issues of concern. In short, the fostering service's system for ensuring that foster carers are competent and otherwise fit for their task, includes sound checks and balances and when considered together with the other measures outlined above result in a service, which objectively presents as safe and subjectively feels safe. This is a view that is echoed by the children and young people who were seen during the inspection, and also their foster carers, who confirmed the rigor of their initial assessment, approval and ongoing review as a process that is challenging but absolutely necessary.

# 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):

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

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

Children and young people in the fostering service's care are assured, and are currently benefiting from, a service that recognises in principle and responds appropriately in deeds to their diverse needs in ways, which are likely to enhance their feeling of worth and promote their positive identity.

## EVIDENCE:

The fostering services own assessment of its performance in ensuring that children and young people and their families are provided with foster care services that both recognise differences and promote equality cites a number of practices and initiatives. These include the referral of children and young people to service, and the process of matching them with carers who are best able to meet their needs such as those arising from their race, religion, culture, gender, disability, etc. The inspector examined these aspects of practice and, as reported in the case of matching in the Staying Safe section of this report, found that the service does actually promote equality in the care of the children and young people and respond reasonably to specific needs.

It was noted that the fostering service has a discrete and adequately resourced service for children with disability who require short break care, and works in unison with the Local Authority Children's Disability Team to provide them a relevant service. For children who are Black, dual heritage or from minority ethnic groups, the fostering service has access to the Local Authority REACCH

(Racial Equality and Celebrating Cultural Heritage) the Manager of which provides guidance and advice on the care of such children and young people in ways that properly respond to their particular needs and issues such as promoting positive identity and combating discrimination. Records seen during the case tracking process provided evidence of an example of effective intervention by the Manager who leads the project. That is, in pursuing an issue, which appears to have been overlooked at a previous case review and therefore demonstrating that there is effective in-service advocacy for the relevant children and young people.

The foster carers' record of training and resource material made available to them, as seen at inspection, shows that they receive the necessary training and support to assist them to care for children and young people with due regard to their religion, disability, culture, etc. There was also evidence in the records and in what foster carers said, to suggest that they are provided with the appropriate equipment and, in some cases, receive financial assistance to have their homes modified so as to enhance the well being of foster children with special needs.

Examples highlighted by some foster carers showed that some sterling work was being done in the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. Although most of these children and young people are placed in households of a different culture and religion, their carers said they receive the support necessary to assist them. In some cases carers of their own volition have sought to research the culture and religion of these children and young people including attempting a rudimentary understanding of their first language so as to be effective in their parenting. In addition to having access to the Asylum Seekers Project for advice, there is a translation and interpretation service to which the fostering service has access.

As a precursor to the inspection, the inspector was invited to observe the foster carers support group meeting closest to the start of the inspection visit. An item and the agenda for this meeting and the discussion of it confirmed that carers now have greater flexibility in how to apportion the agreed sums allocated for the children/young people's personal allowance. This means that carers are able to support the children and young people more naturally in pursuing special interests and hobbies without recourse to bureaucratic processes. This applies to children with disabilities, who carers said they endeavour to introduce to a wide variety of activities. For example, one carer cited the example of teaching a child with visual impairment to ride a bicycle.

In essence, it was concluded from the evidence that the fostering service makes more than adequate provisions for children and young people in ways that recognise and respond appropriately to their diverse needs.

During the inspection consideration was given to the fostering service's performance in supporting the education of children and young people in its

care. It was concluded that what is currently being done is commendable and fulfils the quality indicators laid down in the relevant standard (i.e., standard 13). This conclusion was reached on the evidence that the Local Authority has a strategy for improving the education of the children and young people in its foster care, which resulted in five young people leaving its care system for university during 2005/06. Evidence was also provided of academic, vocational and other achievements being promoting through the Baradell Awards and Grant Fund, and the Local Authority's public recognition of children and young people's successes as demonstrated in a recent awards ceremony<sup>1</sup>. It was also observed that the children and young people have access to, or are being monitored by, a co-ordinated service, i.e., The Education of Looked After Children (TELAC). This service has been established since 2003 and contributes to the Local Authority's Corporate Parenting Strategy by providing guidance and support to looked after children and their schools in ways that seek to remediate any difficulties and promote desired educational outcomes.

Steps have been taken via some of the earlier mentioned consultation events to find out the children and young people's views about their education. The outcome of this is that all those who took part indicated that they have been influenced by the value that the service places on educational attainment and therefore recognise the importance of school. Both this group of young people and those under-8 years old, who were consulted in October 2006, reported in the majority that they are supported by their carers and others to succeed in their schoolwork. Examples such as having access to a computer in their foster homes and receiving help with reading and other formal and informal aspects of learning (activities) were cited as being ways in which they are assisted. Other supportive initiatives such as providing young children who enter the fostering service with the Sure Start Book Trust starter pack and details about the library service were also observed. This accords with the positive responses to an item on the Commission's children's questionnaires about the help that they receive to be successful in their education.

Most importantly, the Local Authority has identified gaps in its strategy such as the need for greater co-ordinated vocational support for school leavers in foster care and has initiated planning to address this. In this connection, it will be necessary to also take account of reports by some foster carers of children and young people being excluded from special school for seeming to exhibit the type of behaviours that characterise their special educational needs status. Furthermore, that there is inadequate localised provision for compensatory education or meaningful occupation for those who are excluded including those excluded from the Pupil Referral Units.

<sup>1</sup> **Nuneaton Telegraph (24<sup>th</sup> November 2006)**

# 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):

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

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

At the last inspection it was reported that the fostering service, in ways which are relevant to the children and young people's age and understanding, gives them a voice and also due regard to what they say when they use it. This continues to be the case and remains one of the more remarkable features of the service, which is to be commended.

## EVIDENCE:

The fostering service manager in the self-assessment of the service concludes that promoting contact arrangements between children/young people and their families or other significant persons is taken into account in all aspects of its foster care. Furthermore, that this is reflected in foster carers preparation, initial and on-going training. Foster carers confirmed that they have received training that emphasises the importance of contact for children in foster care and the role that they are expected to play in facilitating this.

The sample of Foster Carers who were interviewed indicated their accord with the fostering service expectations of them in this regard, and they cited transporting children to contact venues, making the telephone available for children to use to contact their families and other means of keeping them up to date with events in their lives such as successes at school as ways in which they contribute. This also reflects the views of foster carers as indicated in their response to a questionnaire, which was administered as part of this inspection.

It was noted from the children's records that contact arrangements feature in the matching process, their individual Placement Plan and the Placement Agreement. This is also considered a standard agenda item in the periodic review of the children and young people's cases. Children and young people who were seen during the inspection were aware of their contact arrangements and were satisfied with them.

At the last inspection positive observations were made about the fostering service initiatives to consult children and young people and to listen genuinely to what they have to say. This continues to be the case and is evidenced by the complaints procedure and the independent children's rights and advocacy service, which are well promoted including being made available on videotape. For example, all the children young people who were interviewed and those who responded to the inspection survey said that they knew how to complain.

It was noted that as a result of children's consultation events in the past, attempts have been made to engage children and young people more actively in review of their cases and more recently there have been similar events to find out their views about how they are being looked after in relation to the five outcomes – staying safe, being healthy, etc - as referred to earlier. This is with a view to honing service development with the children and young people's current experience in mind. Such an event was held in July 2006 as reported in the Children's Newsletter (Autumn 2006) and confirmed by a councillor who is also cabinet member with lead responsibility for children's services. The purpose of the event was to enable elected members to hear first hand the children's experience of being looked after so that with this in mind they might more effectively perform their corporate parenting duties. This and a similar event which the inspector attended, which has been referred to earlier, suggest a real attempt to listen to the children and young people and to reflect their views in the development of the services.

It was also observed that it remains the fostering service routine practice to seek feedback from children and young people at the end of the placements with foster carers and as a contribution to the annual review of the foster carers performance. Though the evidence in the records, which were seen, suggests that this is not consistently done, the intention is that the children's views are sought and used to influence the quality and effectiveness of their day-to-day care.

Children and young people also have the opportunity to comment on their care or the fostering service by e-mail, the address of which is also widely promoted.

# 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):

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

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

Children placed in the Local Authority's foster care service enjoy economic wellbeing and are being prepared in ways that are likely to help them sustain this into adulthood.

## EVIDENCE:

At the last inspection foster cares reported that they were satisfied with the allowances and expenses awarded for the maintenance of the children in their care. The children and young people who were seen said that they considered that they were enjoying a good material standard of living including having nice holidays. The views given on this occasion are similar and accord with the inspectors own observations of visiting a sample of foster homes seeing their condition and learning something of the lifestyles that the children and young people enjoy. That is to say, children and young people are living in households, which are well equipped; they have adequate clothing and footwear which are fashionable and other paraphernalia of youth culture that ensure that they are not made conspicuous because of the looked after status.

A document: *Consultation Document Foster Care Finance*, was produced at inspection the contents of which indicated that the Fostering Service was not only keeping this aspect of its activity under review, but had consulted foster carers and given them options from which to choose. Adoption of one of those options has since been agreed and the new approach has been put into effect. A particular feature of this is more flexibility in how they and the children allocate the personal allowance element of the fostering allowance. This means that the budgeting in foster homes is not skewed for the foster children. Accordingly, they are now more likely to experience the benefits and

constraints of budgeting to purchase more expensive items by saving or through their allowances being managed to support their particular lifestyles and to facilitate their special interests, hobbies, etc. In addition, to the evidence seen in this regard, there was other documentary proof of the Local Authority's fostering allowances being in line with the national rates recommended by the Fostering Network (a national foster care association).

Although none of the cases, which were tracked included young people who are currently being deliberately prepared for independence, there was evidence, as required, of foster carers being expected to contribute to preparing children and young people for independent or semi independent living. There is an assumption in the Foster Carers Agreement that, in routine care activities, they will teach children self-care and other skills to promote their independence. There is also evidence of foster carers receiving training to equip them to contribute to the more deliberate preparation of those nearing the time when they will cease to be looked after by the Local Authority. This involves working with the specialist leaving care service and contributing to the development and implementation of the young people's Pathway Plans. No adverse views were expressed by children, staff or carers in relation to this aspect of the care. It was, however, noted that the fostering service team in Nuneaton was having to supervise the supportive lodging scheme, which is managed separately and for which no additional resources appear to have been allocated. This seems anomalous since some records indicate that supervising social workers do not have sufficient time to fulfil all the routine supervisory visits to foster carers and a dedicated leaving care team exists. It was also observed that some foster carers' experience is that supervising social workers have too much to do hence some of their legitimate duties such as conducting Level 1 assessments are deferred for an unacceptably long period.

# 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):**

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

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

The fostering service is competently managed, properly organised and resourced so provides an overall excellent service from which the children and young people are benefiting. It is encouraging to note that though those responsible for, and those who are employed, in the Service recognise its

achievements, there is no complacency and realistic recognition that there is still scope for improvement particularly in being able to provide a wider choice of foster placements, further minimising placement changes and being able to accommodate more children within or nearer to their local community. Furthermore, not only are these areas for improvements recognised, but there is planning to address them.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The manager and staff of the fostering service were able to provide evidence of a clear rationale, in its Statement of Purpose, for the running of the Service. This includes a range of relevant policies, procedures and practices. The Statement of purpose accurately reflects the range and functions of the services provided, and is appropriately summarised in the children's guide so that they get a clear understanding of what they can reasonably expect.

Serving the whole county, the service is organised and managed to reflect this. That is to say, there is a nominated operational manager who is in turn accountable to a senior manager of the Children's Services Directorate. In order to provide the fostering service as close to home as possible, the Service is organised on a core and cluster basis. This means that it is managed from a central location from where certain centralised functions are conducted such as foster carers recruitment and training, the short break scheme and the liaison with the adoption team. Cluster fostering service teams operate from various districts each of which provides one of its supervising social workers to make up a daily duty team that deals with all referrals. This is done on a rota basis.

The Service is underpinned by a sufficient allocation of professional and administrative staff and the necessary systems and practices to enable it to operate effectively. For example, the system for recruiting, assessing, approving and reviewing foster carers is deemed safe and the Service has an established foster carers training and development centre with an exemplary reputation, which is borne out in practice. For example, the Services' own National Vocational Qualification Centre has trained and supported 74 foster carers to achieve NVQ level 3 in Health and Social Care (Caring for Children and Young People) and 35 are currently working towards being similarly accredited.

Carers told the inspector and indicated via this inspection survey, that they receive adequate support from the fostering service, but at times were thwarted and undermined by frequent changes of the children's social workers, which means that they often had to wait an unreasonable length of time for some decisions to be made. In commenting in our survey on the worst things about the fostering service, foster carers indicated that sometimes insufficient numbers of staff means that those who are available, are under pressure,

which causes them to make mistakes and take a long time to get around to completing some tasks. In a minority of instances a lack of effective communication between supervising social workers and children's social workers was cited as a difficulty.

Some of the difficulties that foster carers said they encountered in caring for children, such as obtaining passports, indicates need for an administrative process whereby such consents and documentation that they need to care for fostered children as though members of the family should be set in train and achieved within a specified timescale. For example, some carers said that they and fostered children were sometime put under unnecessary stress because passports and necessary consents were not in place at times when they were planning family holidays abroad.

All social workers employed in the fostering service are professionally qualified, and documentary evidence was provided, and confirmed by a sample of those interviewed, that there is an induction programme and in-service and post-qualifying training for new and established staff. Some staff considered that the induction programme should include training and guidance in conducting assessment of carers for those who are qualified and experienced social workers but are new to fostering service as a specialism. They said that this would give them more confidence in the early stages.

This inspection did not examine cases where the Local Authority contracts with other fostering agencies to provide foster care, the inspector was nevertheless apprised of evidence in the form of a specimen contract, which is used in such instances. The requirements in the contract, in the inspector's opinion, were adequate to protect the children placed in those circumstances. As mentioned earlier, the fostering service has demonstrated that it is rigorous in its assessment of prospective foster carers, providing them with the necessary guidance in the Foster Carers Handbook and, makes clear in the Foster Care Agreement and Placement plans, what it expects of foster carers.

A sample of children's case records, which are kept by the fostering service and by foster carers, was examined. In all instances they were found to be comprehensive and up-to-date. The information that carers are given ensures that they have a clear understanding of the children's legal status, their needs and the plans for their future. Carers were deemed, on the basis of the information they were seen to be given, to be in a position to help the children and young people to understand their circumstances and to appropriately document events including those experienced in current foster care. Photograph albums and scrap books were cited by foster carers as being among the means used to achieve this.

Records kept both by the fostering service and foster carers are securely stored, carers being provided with secure storage. There is a clear understanding by all those involved about the confidentiality of those records

and at the last inspection foster carers were observed receiving training in how to make accurate and non-stigmatising records.

As is required by the relevant regulation, the fostering agency was seen to keep records of notifiable events such as serious illness of children in its care and complaints and allegations made by children or in relation to their care. The data from these records are routinely audited and analysed the most recent analysis being presented for this inspection. This demonstrates that there is a system for monitoring that is reasonably robust for the protection of the children and young people so that if any undesirable patterns begin to emerge timely interventions can be made.

The Local Authority was seen to promote family and friends as carers and whilst recognising the kinship or particular relationships involved in this type of carer arrangement, ensures that the carers receive the resources and support they need to provide safe and effective care. In short friends and family carers receive the same level of training, supervision and support as other carers. One such carer told the inspector that her experience of the service is one of a competent professional approach, which has proved beneficial to child and family involved, and has led to the best possible outcome from a situation of concern.

# 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

<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>12</b>	4

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	3
<b>6</b>	3
<b>8</b>	3
<b>9</b>	4
<b>15</b>	4
<b>30</b>	3

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	4

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

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

### 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.	FS8	Foster carers should be provided with a record of the factors in the matching process that inform the decision to place each child with them or this information should be clearly reflected in the Placement Agreement together with any compensatory measures which are to be taken where the match is not ideal. .
2.	FS16	The incidence of children and young people being excluded from school should be examined with a view to determining whether more routine representations need to be made on their behalf to reduce the numbers of those being excluded or the need to provide compensatory education or meaningful occupation for such children and young people during periods of exclusion.
3.	FS16	The responsibility placed on the fostering service to supervise supportive lodging arrangements should be reviewed with a view to either providing additional staffing or deleting it from the fostering service functions.

4.	FS17	Those responsible for the fostering service should take account of some foster carers perception and experience of the Service, at times, lacking adequate staffing to expedite routine duties in a timely way. This should be considered in relation to 3 above. .
5.	FS17	Those in charge of the fostering service should ensure that social workers new to the fostering specialism, receive training in conducting assessments of prospective foster carers as part of their induction programme.
6.	FS24	The Local Authority should, on placing children in its foster care, ensure that carers are provided with all the necessary authorisations and documentations (such as passports) so that carers are able to proceed with the routine care of the fostered child without undue disruption to their own family life or in ways that do not curtail the experiences of fostered child, say, in joining the family on holidays abroad.

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