



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Reading Borough Council Fostering and Adoption Team

P O Bx 2624

Reading

RG1 7WB

9th March 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Reading Borough Council Fostering and Adoption Team

Address

P O Bx 2624, Reading, RG1 7WB

Local Authority Manager

Judith Russell

Tel No:

0118 9390900

Address

P O Bx 2624, Reading, RG1 7WB

Fax No:

0118 955 3746

Email Address

Judith.Russell@reading.gov.uk

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 ?

Date of last inspection

Date of Inspection Visit		9th March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		9.30am	
Name of Inspector	1	SHELLEY MCDONALD	
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Reading Borough Council fostering service provides substitute family care to meet the needs of Reading children and young people who are looked after by the authority on either a short term/temporary or longer term/permanent basis.

The service also supports children who continue to live within their family of origin by providing regular periods of family based care.

The service recruits, trains and supervises a range of foster carers to meet the needs of these children and young people.

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.)

The overall findings of the inspection were that the fostering service was largely both regulation and standard compliant.

The staff group continue to be very committed to meeting the needs of children and young people and to helping carers develop the skills and knowledge required for the tasks they undertake.

Carers interviewed and surveyed during the inspection process clearly valued the work undertaken by the fostering service staff and felt supported by them.

The inspector was pleased to see that the children's guide has now been produced in a format appropriate for children and young people and that most other recommendations from the previous inspection have been followed.

The service recognises the value of kinship care and has created a new post to give specialised support to this group.

The service has a well-established foster panel with excellent procedures and policies in place.

This efficiently managed service which now has an increased staffing establishment is well placed to meet the demands it faces over the next 12 months.

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:

YES

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:

NO

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:

Those statutory requirements that appear on page 11 of this report.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

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	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission 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 **Shelley McDonald** **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Locality Manager _____ **Signature** _____
Date **14/03/04** _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	34(3) Schedule 6	FS8 FS10 FS13	Foster Placement Agreement to be brought in line with regulation	1/09/04
2	37(3)		Visits to be made to any child in foster placement in accordance with this regulation	1/03/05

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	Instances of children in foster care who are bullied to be recorded
2	FS15	Telephone enquiries made of referees to be recorded on personnel file
3	FS18	Whistle blowing policy to be distributed to all foster carers
4	FS20	Supervision files are established for sessional staff
5	FS22	All foster carers receive a foster carer handbook Unannounced visits should be clearly identifiable in the carer record

6	FS23	Both adults in two carer households to complete core training
---	------	---

* 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	3.5
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	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	NO
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	NO
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	9/03/04
Time of Inspection	09.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	27

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Reading fostering service has a comprehensive Statement of Purpose which sets out very clearly the aims and objectives of the service along with the facilities and services provided.

The service has adopted the recently published BAAF Children's Guide to fostering and devised an excellent short leaflet to accompany this. Unfortunately none of the children and young people or foster carers interviewed could recall seeing these. The service manager said that it had been distributed - it is recommended that a system is established for recording documents that carers and children have received.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

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

The pre-inspection questionnaire, self assessment document, inspection of personnel records, meeting with the staff team, meetings with foster carers and the interviews with the service manager and a deputising manager indicated that this standard continues to be met.

One deputising manager has received appropriate management training and the second is preparing for this.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

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

Personnel records inspected indicated that references and checks are being taken up in accordance with regulation and standards. The recruitment policy has been revised to include CRB checks.

A monitoring system has been established to ensure the Service Manager has sight of CRB checks (formerly only seen by Human Resources Department).

The Manager was advised that CRB checks need to stay on file until seen by inspectors.

This standard is met.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service has in place procedures and policies governing this area. These included:

Staff supervision
File monitoring
Allowance Schedule
Fostering Procedures

Implementation was seen in a sample of staff supervision files, carer files and through interviews with staff and foster carers.

This standard is met.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The pre-inspection questionnaire, self assessment document, inspection of personnel records, job description, meeting with the staff team, meetings with foster carers and the interviews with the service manager and a deputising manager indicated that this standard continues to be met.

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?	3
<p>The fostering service ensures that Health and Safety issues are addressed with carers in their initial training and then followed through in the assessment and post approval – evidenced in preparation group programme/reports, carer files, foster carer handbook and inspection visits to foster carers. These homes appeared to be safe environments for the children and young people placed.</p> <p>The service has also produced a clear and informative safe care guidance policy for staff, highlighting areas on which carers will need advice and guidance.</p> <p>The service has developed a very helpful risk assessment form to be completed before a child or young person is placed with a foster carer.</p> <p>The service has now purchased for all carers the Fostering Network Carer handbook which is regulation compliant and addresses this standard.</p>		

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The Local Authority has an equal opportunities policy and promotes anti-discriminatory practice – there is compulsory training for staff on this.</p> <p>The Foster Carer preparation training programme also addresses these issues.</p> <p>In discussion with the staff team they acknowledged that resources continue to be limited for making appropriate matches for all the immediate/short term placements they were asked to make.</p> <p>The fostering service runs a respite care scheme for children and young people with a learning and/or physical disability. The scheme manager has revised the documentation to take particular account of the needs of children with disabilities and their families.</p> <p>The service facilitates fostered children and their foster families to take up leisure activities by their Passport to Leisure scheme.</p> <p>This standard is met.</p>		

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The staff team acknowledged a continuing difficulty identifying appropriate matches for children and young people when making short-term placements. Although there are vacancies with carers at present, these do not necessarily match the complex needs of the children and young people requiring placements, many of whom are 12+.

In some cases agency placements are made and the authority employs a placement officer to assist with this. It was evident that the service ensures that appropriate checks are made of agencies.

Where trans-racial or trans-community placements were made, the fostering service did provide additional support and there were some good examples of this. The service has a resource bank for staff and carers and good use is made of the internet for information. However there have been particular problems when placing Eastern European young people – they and their carers need access to interpreters and often these are not readily available.

Carers of children with disabilities will in future be able to access an IT library to assist with communication, games etc

Staff felt that for short-term placements the service frequently received insufficient information and this was reflected in interviews with carers.

Foster placement agreements were not always evident on the carers file but could be seen on the children's file. These took the form of LAC placement Plan part 1 and 2 which are not compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations. The fostering service is advised to provide an agreement form that meets the requirements of Schedule 6 of the Regulations.

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?****2**

The fostering service has comprehensive Child Protection Procedures. There are specific procedures relating to foster carers and the fostering service has developed a Safe Caring Policy which has now been issued to carers.

These issues are also addressed in the preparation programme for prospective carers and within the foster carer's handbook a section advises on the protection of children.

Child protection is now part of the post approval core training which has been developed for carers.

Within the Foster Care Agreement a section states that corporal punishment is not acceptable. This message is further reinforced in the foster carer's handbook.

The fostering service has policies covering bullying and unauthorised absences which have been updated and distributed.

The service was not able to supply information about foster children and bullying. This needs to be addressed.

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

X

%

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?

2

The service has a written policy on the promotion and management of contact between children and their families/friends.

There was evidence from meetings with the staff team, foster carers and children that contact continues to be promoted by the fostering service.

There was clearly a presumption that contact is in the children's interests but also an understanding that a risk assessment should be undertaken before contact takes place.

A number of carers had concerns about the management of contact in that some children were being exposed to many different contact supervisors during a series of contacts. These were frequently agency staff. The need for consistency should be addressed by the service.

This standard is met.

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 service provides training for carers on communicating with children generally. In addition carers are offered training in communicating with children who have learning disabilities.

There was clear evidence that children attend LAC Reviews and that from the interviews with children and young people some felt they were listened to.

There is an established Children's Rights officer who makes contact with all looked after children. In addition the booklet received by children and young people in foster care contains information about how to contact the CRO and how to make a complaint. There is an independent visitors scheme and mentoring scheme for children.

The panel Chair person has carried out user surveys which are used to inform practice.

To facilitate communication the service uses Viewpoint to obtain young service users' views.

This standard is met.

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

A health advisor attached to the multi-agency support team visits every foster carer and can be contacted by them at any time.

Some carers raised concerns about not being able to access very quickly dental treatment for children. This needs to be investigated by the service.

The service now has a formal process for initial health assessments of children and young people and a joint agreement with Health and Education concerning information sharing.

There is a good link between the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and foster carers/fostered children.

The medical advisor had some concerns about health assessments not always being done when a child or young person is being presented to the Fostering Panel for suitability for long term fostering.

LAC documentation seen indicated that foster carers had copies of a child or young person's health record.

Health and safety is now part of the core training for all foster carers.

Overall this standard is met.

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
<p>Foster carers' responsibilities are clearly set out in the Foster care Agreement.</p> <p>The service continues to have access to an Education Advisor who supports Foster carers with education matters or identifies provision where there are problems. Carers reported that they had found the service very helpful.</p> <p>Some foster carers were concerned about transport safety when children attend school at a distance from the foster home. Escorts were not always provided and taxi drivers changed frequently. This needs to be looked at by the service.</p> <p>Children who have been excluded from school are usually placed with fee paid carers who are expected to look after them during school hours. Other carers will be provided with day care.</p> <p>The educational attainments of looked after children and young people are monitored by the Multi agency Support Team Board meeting.</p> <p>This standard is met.</p>		

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
<p>The service manager informed the inspector that the Leaving care team continue to play a key role in this. Each young person is allocated a Leaving care Advisor who works with the carer preparing the young person for independence. Carers attend training jointly with the Leaving care Team.</p> <p>This standard is met.</p>		

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?

2

The meeting with the staff team, research of a sample of personnel files, pre-inspection questionnaire, written policies/procedures and meeting with the fostering service manager indicated that this standard was met.

The service needs to ensure that there is telephone follow up of written references and that this is recorded on the personnel file.

An unqualified but experienced worker is undertaking link work with foster carers. However she was closely supervised by an assistant team manager and case records were countersigned.

This standard is met.

Total number of staff of the agency:

6

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

0

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

Overall this standard continues to be met. The staff team considered themselves to be well supported by people who provided formal as well as informal supervision. The fostering service was able to provide a supervision policy.

The staff team indicated that they had regular team meetings which provide for group supervision, training, information exchange on developments in the service and carers.

The service has just introduced a work load management scheme which should evidence overload where it occurs and offer some protection to staff and consequently children and carers. It is already evident that the fostering assistant team manager is overloaded and that the increase in the staffing establishment is likely to exacerbate this. The service needs to look at this area.

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

Since the previous inspection 2FTE social work posts have been added to the team and there has been some increase in administrative hours but staff continued to feel that more of the latter were needed.

The service has again put considerable effort into planning a recruitment programme for the year which has utilised information about patterns and trends in demand for services.

As indicated above there more carers who are able to look after older children and young people with complex needs are required. Also the service wished to place fewer young people in agency foster care. With these factors in mind the service has put in a second bid for the Foster Care Treatment Programme

Overall this standard is met.

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?

2

The carers have access to the Berkshire out of hours service and there continues to be support available via the Reading Carer Link scheme – a rota of experienced carers operates until 11 pm seven days a week.

It was evident from files and speaking to carers that they have regular supervision.

The service's new guidance on health and safety has been given to carers.

The service has only recently drawn up a whistle blowing policy for carers and children which should now be distributed.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Training is widely available within the authority and fostering staff also have access to external specialist courses. Opportunities for joint training with carers exist. Staff are kept up to date with professional developments through the use of team meetings.</p> <p>Policy documents and supervision files indicate that training for individual staff is under regular review.</p> <p>This standard continues to be met.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>From the interview with the fostering service manager and the meeting with the staff team it was evident that the staff team were well supported and supervised. Supervision files confirmed that supervision is on a regular basis.</p> <p>Appraisals are up to date.</p> <p>It was evident from supervision notes extracts appearing on individual carer files that sessional staff are being supervised but it is recommended that supervision files are set up for these staff.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)		
The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Overall this standard is met.</p> <p>The foster carers interviewed and those responding to the survey indicated that they were well supported by the fostering service but some felt dissatisfied with support from the children's workers.</p> <p>There is a long term carers' support group facilitated by an external trainer/consultant and highly valued by those who attend.</p> <p>There are also occasional coffee mornings for carers run by the service.</p> <p>The majority of annual reviews are now taking place as required but some are overdue. The service manager informed the inspector that she and her assistant team managers are monitoring reviews through supervision and file monitoring. It is also planned to revise the review process and format.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The majority of the foster carers interviewed and surveyed indicated that they were well supported by the fostering service.

The service supports a local support group run by carers for carers. This group issues a regular newsletter and operates an out of hours support service.

The Foster Care Agreement has now been revised in line with the regulations and standards but some carer files did not contain a copy. It appeared that this was because they had not been returned by the carers in question – this needs to be followed up

Not all carers appear to have received the new handbook along with policies and procedures specific to the Reading fostering service. It is recommended that a system is established whereby carers sign for written information and that their supervising social workers induct them into any new policies etc that they have received, recording this in the supervision record.

Family Link carers do not yet have a handbook but the inspector was informed that this is in hand.

Regular supervision of carers is now taking place and carers are receiving copies of their supervision record. This needs to be extended to those carers on the Family Link scheme who look after children overnight. Also the service needs to ensure that some visits are made when the child is in the Family Link Placement.

There was some evidence of unannounced visits to foster homes but in many of the files seen this could not be found. It is recommended that there is a requirement for these visits to be recorded on the annual review form.

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?****2**

The fostering service continues to provide pre-approval training for all foster carers with the exception of kinship carers. Experienced carers are involved in this training.

Post approval there is a wide range of training available to foster carers within the authority and it is now required that carers attend 4 training events each year but the Fostering Assistant Team Manager indicated that usually only one person in a two carer household will attend.

A core training programme has been developed and the authority is advised to require both carers to attend where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers. (even if the second carer waits for the rolling programme to come round again)

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

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

The service has appropriate policies regarding the writing and storage of records.

The majority of foster carers interviewed and surveyed said that they had received sufficient information about the children placed with them.

Interviews with foster carers in their homes indicated that they had worked with children regarding issues to do with the children's past.

The inspector noted the good practice of carers forwarding a monthly summary of their log on any child placed to the child's worker.

This standard is met.

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?	3
---------------------------	---------------	---

Overall this standard was met.

It is recommended that allegations and complaints about carers are clearly recorded with the investigation and outcome on the carer's file in a distinctly separate section.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			127
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			63
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			31
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			20
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			5
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	140.13	Maximum £	296.43

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The team is in a purpose built open plan office with good secure record storage.
This standard is met.

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?
---------------------------	---------------

N/A	
-----	--

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?
---------------------------	---------------

N/A	
-----	--

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?

4

There is an allowance schedule supplied to foster carers which details the payment levels and how allowances are paid. This is given to all carers.

The service operates a specialist scheme with fee paid carers for hard to place children and young people.

The service pays all its carers above the Fostering Network recommended rates; there is a reward element in the scheme.

Carers seen by the inspector were very satisfied with the allowances.

This standard is met.

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

Written policies and procedures are in place. Panel minutes were seen, the Panel was observed by the inspector and the chairperson interviewed immediately afterwards.

The panel has only 8 members but its composition meets the regulatory requirements. As suggested at the last inspection it would be good practice to include a male.

It was evident that the panel took seriously its monitoring and quality assurance role. It is now receiving management information about supply and demand for placements. Overall this standard is met.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
---------------------------	---------------

Policies and procedures for the Family Link Scheme have been updated and developed. However the new Placement Agreement form does not entirely conform to Schedule 6 of the regulations.(See Standard 8)

The Service uses a very helpful incremental approach to assessment of Family link carers based on the type of care they are offering.

There was evidence that partnership between parents, carers and the Service is working well.

This standard is met.

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?	3
----------------------------------	----------------------	----------

The service recognises the value of kinship care and has created a post specifically to support these carers.

Such carers are invited to all training events and the service now pays them at the same level as other carers.

This standard is met.

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 <enter date(s) of inspection here> and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

NO

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

NO

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

NO

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 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

NO

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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 NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I, Judith Russell of Reading Borough Council 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, Judith Russell of Reading Borough Council 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.