



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Liverpool City Council Fostering Service

**Millenium House
60 Victoria Street
Liverpool
Merseyside
L1 6JQ**

Lead Inspector
Mrs Lynn Paterson

Key Announced Inspection
3rd May 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Liverpool City Council Fostering Service
Address	Millenium House 60 Victoria Street Liverpool Merseyside L1 6JQ
Telephone number	0151 233 6806
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Liverpool City Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr James Clarke
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection

Brief Description of the Service:

Liverpool City Council's fostering service provides a variety of fostering services for children and young people residing in the city of Liverpool. The service is based in council offices known as 'Parklands', which are located in Speke, approximately eight miles from the city centre.

The fostering service consists of a principal officer, who oversees the operation of the service. Three team leaders, 7 senior social workers, 18 social workers, 10 support workers and a recruitment worker.

The fostering service provides a range of placements for children and young people, who are unable to live at home with their families. These placements are either made on a short-term or a long-term basis depending on the needs of the child. The objective of the service is to return a child home as soon as possible and when this is not possible, to secure the child in a permanent placement in order to improve their life chances. At the time of the inspection, there were around 400 foster carers providing a variety of temporary and permanent care for over 600 children and young people in their care. The service works closely with social workers from the children and family area teams, education, health, cultural services and other appropriate agencies.

When unable to provide a foster placement for a child or young person in Liverpool, the fostering service will obtain a fostering placement from the voluntary and private sector.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection of Liverpool Fostering Service commenced on 3rd May 2006 and was carried out by 2 inspectors over a period of ten days. The inspection process began with a site visit and included a tour of the premises, inspection of various records, files, policies and procedures and interviews and discussions with managers and staff of the fostering service. Eight foster carers were visited in their homes and the carers and young people looked after were spoken with. Foster carers, educationalists and young people were also spoken with in various settings during the inspection to include meeting carers during their pre approval training and meeting young people and teaching staff within two educational establishments.

Fieldwork also included discussions with health workers, social workers and foster carers who provided a mentoring scheme and observation of training and assessment processes.

Questionnaires about the quality of the service were sent to foster carers and young people over the age of seven to enable them to give their perceptions of the overall service delivery, however only a small percentage of these questionnaires have been returned to date.

What the service does well:

The management team of the fostering service have devised a service development plan and it was noted that the service had addressed all the requirements and recommendations recorded during the previous inspection and had revised many policies and procedures accordingly.

The service identified that they have established a children's forum, which is led by a young person looked after and have developed various mechanisms to ensure that children and their carers are fully included in decision making. A direct work team works with children who may experience behavioural difficulties and also work to focus on and promote the views of children.

A fostering service children's guide has been updated and includes valuable information about growing up in foster care, national standards and general details about rights, safe care and quality assurance. Young people spoken with said that the document was helpful in assisting them to understand the looked after system

The recruitment strategy has, as a central element, the importance of recruiting foster carers who can meet the assessed needs of each child in

terms of ethnicity, religious, sexual orientation, disability and cultural needs. Recruitment procedures viewed and observed both visually and audibly indicated that the service truly values diversity.

The fostering panel has a balance in terms of race and gender and the people managing the fostering service ensure that all staff have appropriate qualifications and undergo robust recruitment checks prior to commencement of their role.

Records viewed identified that the fostering service, generally promote the health and development of young people looked after. Policies state that the looked after children's nurse carries out a medical within a short time of a young person being accommodated. Records also indicated that children are registered with a GP, have access to dental medical and psychological advice and foster carers are provided with support and guidance to assist the health and development of young people in their care. Comments received from foster carers and young people included "we receive training and support to enable us to promote the health of young people living in our homes", "the looked after nurse is great, she gives good support and is available to give advice when needed". " We are provided with training to enable us to look after the children's health and wellbeing", "I receive a good health care package and if I feel unwell, I tell my foster carer who sorts it out right away".

Records revealed that the management team of the fostering service have raised awareness of the importance of children being healthy as an ongoing agenda item in team meetings and the issue has been raised across Children's Services in Safeguarding and Support and the whole of the corporate parenting service.

Records showed, foster carers are checked by The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to the enhanced level and the foster carers training programme revealed a high emphasis in safe care. Foster carers spoken with advised that they were provided with access to a 24 hour out of hour's service regarding any concerns they may have about the health and safety and protection of the young person looked after.

Liverpool fostering service statement of purpose and discussions held with staff revealed the service are committed to ensuring that the educational needs of children looked after are met and utilised the skills of the Virtual School to assess, monitor and review educational needs, attendance and attainment as an ongoing process. Further information gained by meeting with a foster carer and visiting educational establishments revealed that foster carers received robust training and support to enable them to ensure that young people are provided with an education to meet their needs and capabilities. Young people spoken with and observed in a school setting identified they felt comfortable and at ease with teachers and pupils and comments made included "we are encouraged to do our best", "I am helped to make choices in what I want to achieve and am assisted with my school work by my foster carer", " I am encouraged to achieve my maximum potential". Foster carers spoken with said

“Liverpool Fostering Team assist young people to do well in their education, children are supplied with computers and other equipment to enable them to achieve electronic information and build on their IT skills”, “The young people here are encouraged and supported to do well with their education and we are asked by the fostering service to ensure that all children have good attendance records at school”,

Foster carers said that they think staff of the service are knowledgeable and supportive and staff treat foster carers with respect and value them for the service they provide for looked after children.

The management team appeared to be respected by the staff and foster carers and comments received included “they have laid strong foundations that they continue to build on”, “they listen and assist wherever possible”, “we as foster carers now feel valued by the service”, “I would recommend anyone to this service as it has improved beyond belief”.

Other comments received from staff and foster carers about the person who is named as having overall responsibility for the management of the fostering service included “he is very hands on and directs the teams very well”, “he listens and responds and acts where appropriate”.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The managers showed they had a clear vision for the continuous development of the service and are currently working on strategies to provide good outcomes for all service users. The managers have also developed clear understanding of financial management and ensure that scarce resources are targeted effectively.

The service have developed a placement pack for young people who are entering the looked after system and have utilised the skills of a staff member of the children’s services to deliver training and information about advocacy.

The foster carers development group has recently re-established its membership to include representation from different groups in order to fully promote equality and diversity. Plans are also in place to make changes to the foster carers assessment and training process. This will involve use of Skills to Foster training which the agency feel will promote equality and diversity more broadly.

The fostering service has a programme of training, which ensures targeted training is delivered as an ongoing process.

The service has revised its policy and procedures for emergency placements and now uses more written evidence of the matching considerations when placements are extended beyond 24 hours. The duty system has also been revised and referrals for temporary placements are more comprehensive and include robust risk assessment.

Exemption procedures have been revisited to ensure that all staff has full understanding of the process.

Foster carers review systems have been improved and amended and a review panel has been introduced to ensure that all carers are annually reviewed. Foster carers spoken with said they felt the review systems were clear and comments included "we are made to feel at ease within the review and the language used is easy to follow, no jargon", "my supervising social worker is supportive and when my review is carried out I feel very much included in the conversation".

Records show that links with the Virtual school have been strengthened with the fostering team and foster carers.

Care 2 Educate has been introduced as a training programme to enable foster carers to assist and support young people in their care to attain an educational service tailored to their need. Foster carers spoken with who were currently undertaking this training revealed that it was a most interesting ten week course which gave clear information about all aspects of understanding, encouraging and supporting education for the young people looked after.

Foster carers training in respect of contact has now become part of the core training and foster carers identified that they understood that contact played a major part in the lives of the young people who wished to remain in touch with their birth families and others who had played a significant part in their lives.

The service has developed closer links with Leaving Care Team, which has served to enhance young people as they move towards independence.

Family and friends carers receive the support of a worker from the fostering team and a support group has been established. Comments received from a carer who said s/he was "in-family fosterer" advised that support was provided mainly from the leaving care team, however general support was on hand if required.

Team meetings are now held frequently and are structured with briefings that focus in detail on areas for attention and give staff the opportunity for development. Observations of meetings and discussions held with nineteen members of the fostering service indicated that the team meetings provide an interesting arena in which staff can share information and keep up to date with any changes to the service. The meetings observed were well managed with interesting agendas.

The management team appear to have developed the service to improve outcomes for all who work or are associated with the service.

What they could do better:

The service operates from a building that does not afford sufficient space to enable staff to access desk space and IT equipment. Staff advised that on occasions they have to wait around the office until they can find work- space and/or equipment. As a consequence staff feel this impacts unfavourably upon their time management. This was discussed with the management team who advised that they were aware of the shortfalls and were working on a solution to the problem.

The service utilises the services of a call centre, which is operated by Liverpool City Council. Persons who need to make contact with the fostering team need to ring a central number and they advise that they are questioned by a member of the call centre staff as to whom they wish to speak and about what they wish to speak about. It is stated that a message is then e-mailed on to the appropriate person. It is stated that this system is not robust and foster carers can be left for days without a response. Foster carers comments on the communication systems in place included " I have tried for days to get though to my support worker without success", "when we ring the call centre we are asked what it is about. We ` then have to give information to a stranger about sometimes sensitive issues. Even then we are never sure if we will be called back". "Call centre staff ask us what we what and why we want it and then I believe they e mail the worker with the information. It is the luck of the draw if we get a call back". Staff of the service also advised that they experience difficulties with the contact centre communication systems. It was agreed that this system was not appropriate as a contact for this service and the management team advised that a direct telephone contact will be put in place in the every near future. The management team advised that they feel that a direct telephone contact would certainly enhance new enquiries and expressions of interest in becoming a foster carer.

Staffing levels have improved since the last inspection however it would be recommended that the service look at ways to retain staff to ensure that the staff group can provide a consistent stable relationship with foster carers and other professionals involved with looked after children.

Staff advised they were not always clear about their full job description and it would be recommended therefore that clear job specifications are provided for all staff to ensure that roles are identified and clarified.

Foster carers advised that the support mechanisms in place in the event of allegations being made against them are provided on an ad hoc basis and the service do not have a structured approach. The service must ensure that procedures are in place in respect of allegations against foster carers and those foster carers confidently is respected. Foster carers advised that they had not received training in all aspects of behaviour management to include restraint techniques. It would be recommended that the service provide full training in behavioural management for all foster carers to ensure consistency of practice. Foster carers advised that they did not get written information about the content of the announced and unannounced visits made by their supervising social worker to the foster carers home. It was agreed that all future visits should be recorded with written information being provided to the carers for future reference.

Although the service has made great inroads with consultation groups it would be recommended that the looked after children be consulted with on their views of their carers prior to the carers annual review. It is also recommended review records and supervision notes are completed in duplicate and signed by all parties to ensure transparency and sharing of information.

Whilst the fostering service has made many improvement in record keeping and placement tracking it would be beneficial if the service ensured that all information about decision making following allegations was recorded and that risk assessments were held on file.

In discussion the management team revealed that they are continuing to be pro active in their pursuits of excellence and as a consequence are reviewing and amending polices and practices as an ongoing process. The management team acknowledged the shortfalls in some of their systems and have identified that they are putting things in place to address them and improve the general outcomes for children.
Overall a most positive inspection.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The fostering service generally promotes the health and development of. Children and provide foster carers with training and support in respect of health and medication management

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers spoken with said they had received pre and post approval training relating to the health and development of children and young people. They advised that they are provided with full information about health services in the area and can speak with the looked after children's nurse if they have any concerns. It was noted that the foster carers handbook held useful information about general health and hygiene issues to include health contact numbers, Blood born viruses, eating problems, first aid and medication policy, hair care and immunisation information.

Records and other documentation viewed identified that children and young people were registered with a General practitioner and health needs were generally fully monitored. Staff advised that it was normal practice for children and young people who were entering the looked after system to have a medical examination carried out by The Looked After Children's nurse. Of six children's records examined, five had received a full medical examination, one was awaiting examination and records identified that all health and development issues were being promoted.

The fostering service identified that they have strong links with CAHMS team and records showed that they have utilised the therapeutic services of this team to meet the physiological needs of the young people looked after.

Staff and foster carers advised the service offer staff and foster carers the opportunity to undertake a comprehensive training package designed to assist them to deal positively with difficult behaviour exhibited by children and young people. They said the course takes a therapeutic approach to enable the course participants in helping children and young people find better ways of coping with difficult situations and strong feelings. Two foster carers spoken with who had embarked on this course said it had helped them to find different ways of relating to children and young people and had enabled them to develop their listening, communication and counselling skills.

Some foster carers spoken with advised that on occasions they had not been provided with appropriate documentation pertaining to health and dental issues and had not been provided with consent authorizations. Eighteen foster carers were spoken with about this issue and it was identified that one placement had been made without the appropriate documentation and one without the provision of consent forms. Further discussions revealed that both situations had been quickly resolved.

The staff team advised that they have plans to work in closer partnership with private sector dentists so that children not registered with a NHS dentist could receive treatment.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3.6.8.9.15.30

Quality in this outcome is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Staff, are provided with training and support by the management team to provide suitable safe placements for children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

Discussions with the three, team leaders of the service identified that they are suitably qualified and experienced of working with children and families. Further discussions held with the team leaders and overall manager of the service revealed that the management team had full knowledge and understanding of protection issues to include safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. It was not possible to access staff "paper" files during the inspection period and it was advised that these had been viewed at the previous inspection. However it was possible to access electronic staff files which indicated that all appropriate police checks and references had been provided prior to commencement of employment. The statement of purpose held details of all staff of the service and their qualifications and experience. It was noted that the service utilised the skills of temporary agency staff, who in discussion stated that they were required to provide Criminal records Bureau (CRB) checks, references and proof of qualification before being offered temporary employment with the fostering service.

Records seen identified that all foster carers had been approved by a process of assessment which included pre approval training being carried out after which the prospective foster carers attended a centre to undergo an assessment. If assessed as suitable to continue the process they would then be further assessed and a report presented to the foster panel.

However it was noted that there was evidence on one foster carers file that s/he had been approved at panel, as a foster carer on 5.03.03 and the CRB check had not been undertaken until 30.03.03. This CRB was noted to now be in need of renewal however there was nothing on file top says that a new CRB check had been applied for. This shortfall was discussed with the team managers who advised they were aware of this issue and had put procedures in place to ensure all safety checks are renewed as appropriate.

The management team advised that a main component of the recruitment and training strategy was the need for foster carers to be continually assessed to be able them to keep children safe. Records show that mainstream foster carers attend the safe care training and have a health and safety check list as part of their approval process

The fostering panel chair has also indicated that the panel now insists on CRB, medical and health and safety and children's reports are obtained prior to approval. Documentation seen revealed that that fostering panel examines all safety issues when considering approval and reviews of foster carers. Whilst it was not possible to observe a fostering panel meeting, discussions with the panel chair identified that the panel currently meets the requirements of standard 30.

Supervising social workers advised that they carried out announced and unannounced visits to the foster carers homes and that a health and safety assessment was carried out on all foster homes prior to placements being made. It was stated that this procedure ensures wherever possible that the premises provides a safe nurturing and healthy environment for the looked after children to live.

Foster carers spoken with said that they received announced and unannounced visits to their homes from their supervising social worker and care files viewed showed that these visits were recorded on file. However some foster carers advised that they were not provided with information about what was recorded about the visit and would find it useful if any written information was shared as a good practice issue. However other comments received from foster carer's included "I am always keep up to date with anything I need to know", "the fostering staff do a good job", "the workers are most supportive and helpful to us". However in discussion with the team managers it was agreed that in future all supervising social workers would share all information and obtain foster carers signatures to ensure transparency of practice.

Foster carers advised that they were responsible for drawing up a safe care policy for their homes and all foster homes visited as a requirement of the inspection presented as clean, hygienic, homely and well maintained at the time of the visit.

Liverpool Fostering Service statement of purpose outlines their aims, one of which states "Recruit a range of people from a diverse background as possible in order to ensure we can best match the religious, cultural, Ethnic, linguistic, physical, emotional and social needs of any children referred to our service".

Social workers spoken with advised that the matching process was carried out wherever possible and the process utilised included them obtaining as much information as possible about the child, looking at the skills and experience of the available foster carers and considering any other young people who may be in residence. It was stated that pre placement introduction/get to know you visits were also used as appropriate. Staff advised that the fostering service puts a high priority on placement stability therefore wherever possible any movements of children/young people are made in a planned manner. In discussion it was identified that when children are in need of matching for permanent placements, which Liverpool Fostering service cannot meet in-house, places are commissioned from independent Fostering Agencies to ensure all the young persons needs are met.

Foster carers spoken with fully understood the matching process but were aware that sometimes the matching process was not carried out due to either emergency placements or lack of choice of foster carers.

One of four files examined revealed that the file did not have a matching report to show why the foster carer had been matched to the foster children in placement. However discussions with the management team and the panel chair identified that matching reports are now undertaken for all Long term placements and it is their intention to formally approve selected foster carers specifically for emergency placements to ensure that foster carers in this scheme are trained to work with children in crisis. The management team advised that they hope this will reduce the number of exemptions needed and allow for more comprehensive and timely planning for all looked after children.

The foster carers handbook contained information about allegations re foster carers, complaints and representations, anti bullying, whistle blowing and child protection. Foster carers advised that they had received training/information about protection issues but had not received training or advice in respect of restraint management. Two foster carers spoke with advised that they had received an injury as a consequence of unmanageable behaviour of a young person in placement, a situation which they both felt they would have been better able to manage if they had received behavioural management training to include approved restraint techniques. Discussions with the management team identified that some behavioural management training is available but

restraint techniques are not included. It was agreed that this issue would be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Young people spoken with and information gained from questionnaires revealed that they felt safe and well looked after by their foster carers.

As` previously stated information provided in the Statement of Purpose identifies that staff of the service are suitably qualified to work with children and young people and records indicate that the service utilise Liverpool City Councils corporate recruitment and selection processes to ensure that staff provide evidence of their suitability to work in the fostering service. Records indicate that the fostering team structure ensures that all staff have regular, pre arranged, time limited supervision and are fully accountable for their work.

The management team have identified areas in which they feel they can improve the service and as a consequence have reviewed the duty system, enhanced their procedures for request for temporary placements and have ensured that the service provides more recorded information about matching. This includes the matching process being identified in foster carers placement agreements and providing introductory periods for foster carers and young people prior to placement. These actions are seen to be commendable.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7.13.31

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The fostering service has systems in place to promote educational and leisure activities and provide children with the opportunities to be successful. Short-term breaks are sensitively arranged to ensure minimum disruption.

EVIDENCE:

Documentation viewed and discussions held with staff and foster carers identified that the service values diversity and has formed links with various local groups to promote awareness of the need for foster carers from a wide variety of backgrounds. A team leader from the fostering service was heard speaking on local radio about the fostering service in general and of the need to recruit people from all backgrounds. The advertising speech was excellent in content and presentation and was most thought provoking and raised awareness of the needs, wishes and expectations of young people in the looked after system. This advertising campaign included having flyers delivered to targeted areas. It was noted that the service has established a men's foster carers group and has links with interpreters for the deaf and utilises in house translators where appropriate.

Records show that the fostering panel has a balanced membership and the foster carers development group has representatives from differing support groups to promote equality and diversity.

The above information coupled with the services robust policies relating to equality and diversity issues and the key principles of the service as detailed in the statement of purpose to include, "ensuring that all children and adults regardless of age, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation are treated justly and fairly and are fully included in the activities promoted by the service", are seen to be commendable.

Foster carers spoken with said that education is placed high on the agenda of need for young people looked after. It was stated that The Virtual School scrutinises all children looked after in respect of educational need, attainment and attendance and monitors and reviews educational performance. Foster carers advised that staff from the Virtual School attend foster carers support groups to discuss issues or areas of concern. Foster carers advised that they had contact numbers if they wished to communicate directly.

In discussion with a foster carer it was revealed that a newly implemented training course had just commenced. This training Care 2 Educate was to be presented one day per week for a period on ten weeks and covered issues relating to the education of young people looked after.

The course content included –How education is assessed, how to support children with homework, education statements explained, demonstrating the learning opportunities and positive effects provided by out of school activities, learning at home, race and culture, social inclusion, governing bodies and exclusions.

Visits to meet with teaching staff and young people looked after in two education settings revealed that foster carers, educational and social work staff work together to ensure the educational needs of the child are met and young people are supported to achieve their maximum potential.

Documentation viewed held information, which indicated that looked after children are provided with leisure passes and computers. Special aptitude grants are given to foster carers for children who have particular talents and interests to enable them to enjoy and achieve in areas such as music and horse riding.

Supervising social workers advised that school uniforms and items of equipment are funded, as are educational trips and holiday grants.

Discussion with a foster carer revealed that payments for some trips and activities are refused. However clarification was sought from the management team and it was said that payments are provided for Educational Trips but not for general social activity.

Children and young people spoken with said they were supported with homework and anything to do with school and were happy as they were

provided with leisure passes and computers. Young people said that their foster carers attended school parent evenings and liaised with school as appropriate.

Documentation seen revealed that the fostering service are developing a system of back up day carers for children who may be excluded from school and whose foster carers are out at work.

Foster carers spoken with said they were well supported to deal with the educational needs of the young people, however it was stated that some carers had experience difficulty with obtaining permission for the young person to go on a school trip. This was discussed with the management team who advised that they were aware of occasional difficulties in this area and as a consequence had revised procedures to alleviate the problem.

The evidence gained from observations, discussions with foster carers, young people, social workers and educationalists identified that Liverpool Local Authority Fostering Service promote an environment to ensure that looked after children are provided and supported to maximise their educational potential.

Short break foster carers are utilised to provide respite care for children with disabilities .A joint funded project "the fusion project" run by health and children's services also provides support workers to help families within their own homes. Workers will stay overnight where needed. This prevents children from having to move out of their family homes for respite or short- term care.

Supervising social workers advised that short break foster carers who provide respite care are provided with whatever specific training needed to meet the needs of the child with whom they are matched.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10.11.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Systems are in place for consultation with children however evidence suggests that some children do not feel their views are given due credence. Contact arrangements are clear and children, foster carers and social work staff are fully aware of the importance of well-planned contact.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements were clearly specified in children's care plans and arrangements for contact known to children and foster carers. Four children spoken with were happy with their contact arrangements. However one young person spoken with stated s/he was not happy with the contact arrangements made on her behalf as the meeting with her birth mother was shared with another sibling. As a consequence the young person said s/he felt sad that s/he could not have quality time with her/his mother. This was discussed with the young persons social worker, who advised that this was the only contact arrangement that the mother would agree too and they could not persuade her to change her mind.

Staff of the fostering service, foster carers and young people spoken with advised that contact is sometimes facilitated in foster homes and contact arrangements are always clear as to time, dates and venues.

Supervising social workers advised that contact between siblings is enabled although a foster carer advised that it was felt that on occasions children were pushed into contact against their will. It would be recommended therefore that a full assessment of sibling relationships be undertaken to determine whether

they should be living together or apart and to ascertain if the children wished to engage in contact. One young person spoken with said s/he had stated her views but they were not acted upon. However discussions and case studies of other contact situations clearly indicated that children's views had been taken into consideration and their wishes re contact fully respected.

Staff of the fostering service advised that the foster carer assessment process looks at the importance of contact with birth families and training on contact is part of the core training.

Documentation seen showed that contact is covered in care planning and the placement planning meetings address the details.

Foster carers advised that they were provided with financial assistance to facilitate contact and were aware of the value of appropriate contact arrangements for the children in placement.

The management team and foster carers spoken with advised that the service had broadened the membership of the Foster Carers Development Group, which they feel has aided consultation.

Documentation shows that systems are in place to ascertain children's views prior to foster carers reviews but it was noted that this information did not appear to be recorded on file. It is recommended therefore that information gained from formal or informal consultations about foster carers and foster placements be recorded and held on file.

Documentation seen during the inspection revealed the fostering service has introduced a young persons forum which young people spoken with said was led by a young person looked after and greatly assisted in the sharing of information and views. It was stated that a direct work team was also place to focus on and promote the views of children.

The management team have made plans to hold more regular planning meetings throughout a child's placement to assess, monitor and review contact arrangements to ensure that children's changing needs can be identified and met. Plans have now been implemented also to hold more consultation meetings with children and foster carers in order to further develop the service around their needs.

All young people spoken with and information gained from returned questionnaires revealed that young people felt they were consulted with and listened to by their foster carers and social work staff. However one young person added that s/he feels that young people would benefit from having access to an independent person. This was discussed with the management team who advised that an advocacy service was available for any young

person who wished to use the service and details of this could be found in the young persons guide to the service.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

29.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The system for providing foster carers allowances and expenses is well managed.

EVIDENCE:

The management team advised that the financial viability of the service is assured because of the Local Authority Status and as such operates within the financial regulations of the City Council.

It was stated that comprehensive payments are made in terms of allowances and expenses for foster carers and these were fully detailed in the foster carers payment guide.

Foster carers confirmed that their allowances were reviewed annually and paid promptly and were sufficient to meet the needs of the children looked after. Foster carers stated that they are provided with additional grants for school trips, holidays, birthdays, special interest and extra tuition where appropriate. Foster carers said they did not receive extra payment for additional training or identified skills: however treatment foster carers do receive enhanced payments. Treatment foster carers are carers who look after children who are particularly challenging and are likely to attend regular therapy, which the foster carer must also attend

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

5.16.17.21.22.23.24.25.26.27.32.

Quality in this outcome area is generally good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. A fairly new management team are in place and they are aware of the need to revise policies and procedures and have demonstrated they have been proactive in their pursuits to achieve positive outcomes for the service.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service employs a sufficient number of qualified and experienced staff that has a clear strategy to work with and support carers. The statement of purpose details staffing levels and outlines the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the newly revised children's guide has been written to enable children and young people to gain information about how the service operates.

The team have clear management structures in place with clear lines of accountability for supervising social workers. However the role of the support worker, both within the fostering team and the Looked After Children Team is not clear to foster carers. Staff in general said they were provided with relevant training, clear workloads and ongoing support. However some support workers spoken with advised that they were not fully clear as to their remit and have asked for clarification of their role to enable them not to "overstep their duty".

Records show that the recruitment and retention of qualified staff has been an area of concern. However it was noted that the management team have implemented recruitment strategies, which have already impacted favourably to the staff numbers and stability of the team.

The fostering service identified that they have strong links with the Adoption and Looked After Children's Teams, links with which staff feel is valuable in promoting the service.

The recruitment strategy for foster carers was seen to be comprehensive and values diversity and figures show the dedicated Recruitment Officer post has proved successful in the recruiting foster carers.

Foster carers advised that the training offered was relevant and interesting and observations of pre approval training identified that this training was of good quality and well presented by staff who themselves showed great knowledge and understanding of the fostering service. People spoken with during this training advised that they were attending the pre approval training prior to undergoing their assessment and comments received included "the training we have received is really good. It has made us think about all sorts of things that could happen and we have been able to get answers to our questions as to what to do in certain situations, "we have learned all about child protection, abuse and things", "The people who provide the training are great they make us feel at ease and able to speak our minds", "we feel that we are part of a team and everyone has a voice".

The management team revealed that staff will receive enhanced training in respect of assessment with the introduction of "the skills to care training programme and associated training package and the newly appointed panel

chair advised that she was planning to attend an assessment programme to familiarise herself with the methods used to assess competencies and skills.

Foster carers spoken with and information gained from questionnaires identified that the general opinion about the service was very positive. Comments from foster carers included "The staff do a very good job", "I feel happy about the fostering service because they support me and I always have someone to contact if I have a problem", "My social worker is excellent, most supportive", "I don't know what I would do without my supervising social worker s/he is just great". One foster carer spoken with said that s/he had a little difficulty at times because the social worker was part time, however the team leader advised that if a worker is part time and a foster carer identifies a problem when that worker was not on duty, another member of the team would offer support. Another foster carer advised that contact and support has much improved over the past year. S/he said s/he had not had many support visits from a social worker until a year or so ago and now the visits are regular and the support is good. It was noted that all staff were provided with mobile telephones and staff advised that mobile phone numbers are provided to foster carers to enable them to make contact.

It was noted from 6 files examined that supervising social work visits are made approximately every three months and foster carers said they receive telephone calls inbetween. However foster carers advised they were not provided with a written record of the supervision visits although regular topics were covered. It was noted that written records were not always available on file, just a record of the date they occurred. It is essential that all visits are recorded and foster carers asked to sign the document to show agreement with the content. It is also recommended that one copy of the document be held on file and the other be provided to the foster carer to keep.

Foster carers said they had a foster care agreement, which identified their role and responsibilities and also what support they could expect from the service. Foster carers advised that they had an allocated social worker that visited them in their homes on a regular basis and reviewed and updated health and safety checks, risk assessments and safe care policies as appropriate.

Foster carers revealed that they were provided with a "buddy" to mentor them if required and 2 separate foster carer support groups were available to attend if they wished. Foster carers advised that out of hours support was provided by the Emergency Duty team (EDT). They said other support systems included informal arrangements between foster carers and the provision of skilled carers who were foster carers who had received extra training to support any foster carers against whom allegations have been made. However a number of foster carers spoken with stated that they did not feel comfortable about other foster carers knowing that an allegation had been made about them and comments included "the allegations were just that, allegations, and they were

quickly found to be untrue. However, a skilled carer was told that an allegation had been made against us and s/he offered us support. We did not want anyone to know about this as what is it they say, mud sticks". " We felt staff of the fostering service should not give skilled carers any information about allegations. It should be up to individuals concerned to pick what help they need and from whom". The management team advised they were in the process of gaining membership of Fostering Network for all foster carers to enable them to have access to an independent help line if required.

Foster carers advised that if they experience difficulty with the child in placement during "out of hours" they could experience problems gaining assistance. It was said that whilst the EDT could be contacted, the problem foster carers encountered were sometimes not seen to be a priority with EDT and the foster carers were therefore left to manage the situation as best they could. Foster carers said that they develop their own network of other carers and obtained help and assistance that way, however they would value more structured out of hours support systems to alleviate pressure. The management team advised that they had recently improved the out of hour's support systems and hope to further develop the service to ensure that full support is available for foster carers 24 hours a day.

Comments received from young people during discussions and through information gained from returned questionnaires indicated that the service was providing placements in which the young people were encouraged to reflect on understanding their history and to keep appropriate records and memorabilia.

The fostering offices are in a central point that members of the public can access with other Local Authority services. Staff share an open plan office with The Looked After Children (LAC) Team and all staff said that this had led to much improved communication. However staff advised that the team had a system of hot- desk, a system in which staff sometimes found it difficult to access a desk or computer. As a consequence staff advised that they were unable to commence work at a time suitable to them or to access messages via the e-mail system. In discussion the management team advised that they were aware of the difficulties and had made plans to improve the situation by utilising a home working practice where appropriate.

The service is in the process of changing the filing systems. At the moment there are some paper records and some electronic information and in case sampling it was noted that the carers files were not kept as in accordance with schedule 3. The team leaders said this was because some files had been inappropriately archived and staff were working to rectify this as a matter of urgency to ensure compliance.

Records viewed and staff and friends and family foster carers spoken with revealed that the services provided to family and friends carers have improved in the past year and all carers are now linked with a support worker and are

subject to an annual review. Foster carers said that a family and friends specific support group has been established which they value.

Discussions with the management team identified that they have developed clear understanding of the financial management of the service and ensure that scarce resources are targeted effectively.

Records, discussions, observations and general feedback identified positive changes to the overall management systems of the service to include enhanced team structures with specific areas of responsibility, a wider range of support and support group provision and improvements to information sharing systems. Foster carers training has also been much improved to enable foster carers to tap into training and development designed to meet individual need.

Whilst the management team are aware that improvements to the service continue to be necessary they have made great inroads to thoroughly modernise the fostering service provision.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	4
9	2
15	3
30	3

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

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

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

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS9	13(1) 13(2)©	The fostering service must ensure that behavioural management systems are in place and that all foster carers receive training in managing behaviour.	30/12/06
2	FS20	17	The fostering service must ensure that all staff has clear written details of the duties and responsibilities expected of them, together with the policies and procedures of the organisation.	30/06/06
3	FS21	17	The fostering service must ensure that they have a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers to include the provision of out of hours support.	30/06/06
4	FS22	17	The fostering service must ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named appropriately qualified social worker that provides written information to the carer about all standards, policies, guidance and practices agreed by the fostering	30/06/06

			service. This includes the provision of records of foster carers formal and informal supervision visits.	
4	FS25	22	The fostering service must ensure that all administration records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulation.	30/06/06
5	FS26	23	The fostering service must ensure that the premises used by the provider are suitable for purpose. This includes the provision of adequate space and IT facilities for staff and the provision of effective communication systems to enable staff and service users to make contact.	30/08/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS21	The foster carers Handbook should continue to be reviewed and revised and cascaded to carers to ensure they continue to receive relevant updated service information.
2.	FS22	It is recommended that current informal procedures about investigations into allegations made about foster carers be reviewed in consultation with all foster carers to ensure they feel confident with any independent support offered.
3.	FS26	Phone lines should be installed in the office of the fostering service to assist communication with staff, foster carers and other professionals who may use the service.
4	FS26	Improvements should be made to the office space

		provided to ensure a safe working environment is offered to all who are employed in the fostering service.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Knowsley Local Office
2nd Floor, South Wing
Burlington House
Crosby Road North
Liverpool
L22 0LG

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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