



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Southwark LA Fostering

47b East Dulwich Road
London
SE22 9BZ

Lead Inspector
Maggie Edwards

Announced Inspection
23rd January 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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk 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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Southwark LA Fostering
Address	47b East Dulwich Road London SE22 9BZ
Telephone number	020 7525 4421
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Southwark Social Services
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 21st March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

This is a local authority fostering service covering an inner city area with a wide range of cultural diversity. There is a high level of deprivation and need and a high demand for placements for Children Looked After.

The fostering team consists of a service manager, team manager, two practice managers, a senior practitioner for the Family Link service and 12 social workers. The service employs a further practice manager and a social worker as casual staff.

A brokerage team negotiates placements with Independent Fostering Agencies when suitable placements are not available from the service's own carers. At the time of the inspection there were 344 children and young people being looked after in 184 carer homes. In addition to these placements the Family Link service provides respite care for children with disabilities.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection was carried out over a period of six days by Maggie Edwards and Alison Pritchard. The inspectors met with the Head of Children's Social Care; with the Service Managers for the Fostering, Looked After Children and the 16+ teams and with the Team and Practice Managers for the Fostering Service. They also had meetings with the Senior Practitioner for the Family Link Service and with the fostering service's social work staff group and with the Team Manager of the Quality Assurance Unit, the Principal Finance Officer and managers from the Brokerage Team. A meeting of the panel was observed and the panel chair interviewed. The inspectors attended a training session for applicants to foster, visited a carers' coffee morning and visited six carer homes. Policy documents and a selection of carers' and children's files were examined. 17 young people and 26 carers responded to questionnaires from the Commission.

What the service does well:

Staff at all levels are committed to providing a high level of support, supervision and training for carers. This ensures that the children and young people in their care live in homes that are comfortable and that close attention is given to their emotional, physical, educational and health needs. Social work staff are also well supported by management who ensure the efficient use of well-designed policies and procedures. There are specialist teams dedicated to the education and health requirements of Children Looked After. The 16+ team has well-equipped premises which provide the opportunities for young people to develop practical domestic skills, gain education and employment support and gain access to the housing application process necessary for independent living.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service has increased the number of African carers and has started to form links with the local Vietnamese community. A specialist health service for Children Looked After has been established and the education service for Children Looked After has expanded. There has been a major consultation exercise with young people about their experience of being Looked After in Southwark. This has resulted in the creation of a group called Speaker Box which has met with the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Strong efforts continue to be made to ensure the recruitment of permanent staff with a good knowledge of fostering. The Service Manager for Fostering meets regularly with those for Children Looked After and the 16+ Teams in order to develop methods by which the workers in these teams can be helped to fully understand the nature of the fostering process.

What they could do better:

There is a need to continue to help all staff in the 16+ Team to understand the emotional and psychological issues which arise for young people and their carers as the young person moves towards independence. There is also a need to continue to ensure that all Children Looked After social workers are sensitive to the responsibilities and pressures of the carers' role.

All carer homes visited were warm, safe and comfortable. However, one visit did show that placed children and birth children were sharing bedrooms. Although the care provided was good and the carer was planning to move to larger accommodation the service should continue to pursue procedures which will prevent the necessity for placed children to share bedrooms with birth children.

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.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at the outcome for Standard 12.

The service takes action to ensure that all young people receive health care which is appropriate to their individual physical, emotional and psychological needs.

EVIDENCE:

Children's' files showed that steps were taken at the time of placement to ensure that each young person received a full health assessment by the Community Paediatrician and was registered with a G.P., optician and dentist and that regular checks were then carried out. One young person who was an unaccompanied asylum seeker had been prescribed glasses within two weeks of their placement. A carer had notified their link social worker the day after placement when they discovered that the young person had Hepatitis C. The fostering service responded swiftly providing regular supportive phone calls and putting the carer in touch with the Children Looked After medical service who ensured that the family received appropriate immunisation.

The service has taken steps to ensure co-ordination of the health care needs of Children Looked After. There is a designated nurse for Looked After Children who is also a member of the panel. The Children Looked After Health Project is jointly managed by the Children Looked After Service Manager and the Community Paediatrician. It concentrates on offering support to young people who are neglecting their health needs, including those who are resistant to having regular health checks, those who are at risk of pregnancy and those believed to be involved in drug and alcohol abuse. The service is also available for consultation/advice to foster carers. It reports to the Southwark Social Care Children Looked After Health Group to which two carers also contribute.

The Carelink team is involved in ensuring that the emotional health needs of Children Looked After are appropriately addressed. It is situated in the same building as the Fostering Service and is jointly managed by Southwark Social

Care (Fostering) and the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. There were records in children's files showing that appropriate referrals had been made to Carelink. One young person who had experienced family bereavement spoke positively of the counselling support which they were receiving from the service.

The training programme for people applying to foster includes a session on Health and Development. Carers visited confirmed that they were encouraged to attend training on First Aid and on the nutritional needs of Children Looked After. One young person had written in their questionnaire response, 'I am encouraged to take plenty of exercise and eat the right foods i.e. fruit and veg'.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at outcomes for standards 3,6,8,9,15 &30.

The service follows policies and procedures which ensure that young people are safe and protected from abuse and neglect.

EVIDENCE:

Staff recruitment files examined were in good order. They showed that the appropriate range of checks is taken up and that references are followed up by telephone contact with the referee. The staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, or in the case of unqualified staff, supervision by a qualified manager is provided. Unqualified staff are supported to obtain a social work qualification.

Homes visited were warm, homely and safe. Carers' files showed that the assessment process covers the suitability of the home environment including a health and safety assessment. Training in health and safety issues is provided to foster carers both before and after approval. Files showed evidence of regular Health and Safety checks and unannounced visits to carers. However, in one home which was very comfortable and where the carer was obviously providing good care, two placed children were each having to share bedrooms with a birth child. One bedroom was quite small and this could possibly have been contributing to some recorded tension between the birth child and the placed child. Records showed that the carer was planning to move to a larger property and the service manager had informed one of the inspectors that the

service supports carers who applied to the local authority for more spacious accommodation in order to help them provide adequate space for placed children.

Children's and carers' files contained information which showed that the use of an appropriate referral form combined with the skill and experience of the fostering service workers ensures that close attention is paid to attempting to ensure that each child is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting his/her assessed needs. Foster carers felt that placements made were appropriate to their circumstances and matched their approval conditions. One family visited who were caring for a child with multiple disabilities had adult children of their own who had physical disabilities and the carers had, in the past, organised a club for local children with disabilities. The panel addressed issues of ethnicity, culture and sexuality with applicants in a manner which clarified the prospective carers understanding and approach and helped them to recognise any areas which needed to be further developed.

There are clear and appropriate written policies provided to staff and carers with respect to child protection, bullying, coping with challenging behaviour and incidents when placed children are absent from the foster home without permission. Carers confirmed that they had received training, during their assessment which helped them to understand the issues arising from child abuse, the causes of challenging behaviour and how to cope with this and guidance on providing safe caring as well as information about the legal framework relating to Children Looked After. Carers understood the processes to be followed when placed children make allegations of abuse. There was a written record of allegations demonstrating that each was investigated appropriately. Carer questionnaires showed understanding and acceptance of the use of appropriate punishment methods for use when placed children misbehaved. Children's questionnaire responses demonstrated that such methods involved 'sent to my room for time out' and 'not allowed to go out'. These and similar sanctions were considered reasonable by the young people

All panel members have relevant backgrounds and experience relating to Children Looked After including a care leaver. The panel adviser has many years experience as a social worker in the fostering team. Applicants to foster and carers undergoing reviews are encouraged to attend panel. Observation of the panel process showed that the independent chair ensured rigorous attention to the detail of assessments and other documents. This combined with thoughtful and measured consideration by all panel members resulted in appropriate questioning of assessing social workers and focused but sensitive discussion with applicants and carers. It was apparent that the desired outcome of these processes was to ensure that Children Looked After would receive safe care appropriate to their individual needs. This was evidenced by the panel's decision to reduce the number of children and the age range proposed and to carry out a review in six months time for applicants who showed the potential to be good carers but where it was felt that they may

initially need support in coping with the reality of constantly caring for Looked After Children. It was a reflection of the skill and care with which the panel process was carried out that the applicants were able to accept this outcome positively.

A checklist system has been introduced to the files of panel members but the majority of files did not include the full range of checks and references required. This was discussed with the Service Manager and Team Manager at the feedback meeting and they expressed a commitment to ensure that the files are in good order and include the documentation required by the end of March 2006.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at the outcomes for standards 7,13 & 31.

The service takes positive steps to ensure that placed children are provided with care which is appropriate to their gender, religion, ethnic origin and to any disability. High priority is given to meeting each young person's educational needs in order to encourage them to reach their full potential. Where carers are providing short-term breaks it is recognised that birth parents remain the main carers for the child.

EVIDENCE:

The initial form completed at the time of a young person's referral is designed to ensure that all relevant information is obtained in order to attempt to place the young person with a carer who is most able to fulfil their individual needs.

When recruiting potential foster carers priority is given to applicants who will reflect the local wide range of ethnic and cultural heritages from which the services ` Children Looked After originate. There is a large proportion of black Caribbean carers and the service has been successful in recruiting more African carers. An African carers' group provides support not just to their own members but also to non-African carers who are caring for young people whose birth families originate from African countries. Links are being developed with the local Vietnamese community. The service is very conscious that, in common with a number of other fostering services, there is a particular difficulty in recruiting white carers .The service continues to attempt to address this issue.

A panel member from Nigeria was able to provide valuable information about cultural procedures which helped other panel members to understand some of the issues arising from the Form F assessment of applicants. The panel recommended approval of the applicants and offered them the opportunity to join the African carer's group.

Young people are assisted to develop contacts with other people who share their racial and cultural background and are encouraged to maintain cultural links.

There is a Children Looked After Education Team headed by an educational psychologist, who is also a teacher. The team has a number of duties including intervention to identify appropriate provision for Children Looked After who are identified as having Special Educational Needs; involvement in the preparation of Personal Educational Plans at the time of a child's placement and at any point where there are difficulties; the provision of home tuition for Children Looked After during years 10 and 11 and an overall aim to promote the educational achievement of Children Looked after by their social workers. In addition to aiming to improve the number of G.C.S.E s and other qualifications achieved by Children Looked After the service also recognises the need to ensure the enrichment of young peoples 'lives in a broader sense. The service works with The Globe Theatre which has a programme for the involvement of young people in drama. There is a grant scheme to promote leisure activities.

Visits to carers confirmed that all are provided with a computer to help placed children with their studies and with wider educational use of the Internet. Young people spoke positively about their education. Two young people spoke of their ambitions to move on into higher education and were obviously confident that they would be supported in their aims. Another spoke of their favourite subjects being drama, English and art and of their enjoyment of attendance at drama groups

Workers from the Children Looked After Education Service visit carers to help them to design games which will help to develop a child's literacy and numeracy. A carer with a pre-school child had been provided with an excellent range of toys which were attractive and fun but also stimulated the child's psychological development.

Files contained evidence of attention to educational issues both in original care plans and in reviews. School reports were present as were Personal Educational Plans with evidence of efforts made by the service to encourage completion by young people who were reluctant to engage in this process

There is a specialist Family Link Service which provides foster carers who look after disabled children for short periods on a regular basis. Carers for this service undergo a specific recruitment and training process which recognises the need for them to receive information on issues relating to disability and

also the fact that they will have different roles and responsibilities from mainstream carers. A carer who provides care for a child one weekend each month spoke very positively about the regular support they received from the service and the training which they had received which had helped them to understand the child's medical conditions. They were obviously very fond of the child but equally recognised the importance of remembering that the child's mother remained the main carer. It was apparent from this visit and from the carer's file that the fostering service had helped the carer to develop and maintain a comfortable relationship with the birth parent and that this was of benefit to the child.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at outcomes for standards 10 & 11.

The service takes steps to ensure that each young person maintains contact with family, friends and other significant people as set out in care plans and foster care agreements. The service promotes consultation with young people.

EVIDENCE:

There is good written guidance for carers and staff which emphasises the need to encourage and support Children Looked After to maintain contact with their parents and siblings as described in their Care plan which must take into account any legally approved Child Protection Order or Contact Order. The carers' training programme includes a session on the 'principles and practice of managing contact and parents'.

Children's files contained forms which provided details of approved contacts for each child. There was evidence of close attention to contact arrangements in care plans and reviews and of the updating and modification of arrangements if appropriate. Records of supervising social workers' visits to carers and review documents showed that contact issues are regularly discussed.

One young person spoke happily of their contact with their siblings and was accepting of the fact that they could not live with their mother or have consistent contact with her because of her health problems. It was clear to the inspector that the child had been helped to come to terms with the reality of their situation and to have as positive a relationship as possible with their mother.

Visits to carers showed that they understood the importance of the young people in their care being helped to maintain contacts with their birth families

and other significant people and that there were usually few problems. However carers were confident that the Fostering Service would provide support in instances where contact could be difficult e.g. because of the high frequency required by the court or because of hostility from birth parents .In such situations contact could be arranged at special locations and help would be provided with transport for the children.

The Fostering Service Manager spoke of the service's recognition that courts were now deciding on more frequent levels of contact and of the need to then support carers both psychologically and practically. There were several instances that the inspectors were told about where the support for dealing with these issues had been provided by the fostering link workers, but there were indications that some social workers from the Children Looked After Teams need further input to develop understanding of the pressures on carers resulting from some contact arrangements. Managers described the steps that have been taken towards establishing a better understanding of each other's roles. These include liaison at management level and including a visit to the fostering service as part of the induction of new social workers in the Children Looked After Teams.

However, children's files showed that young people had regular and good communication with their social workers from the Children Looked After Team and that, where appropriate, the young person and their parents contributed to reviews. One file did not contain full documentary evidence but the young person met with one of the inspectors and spoke very warmly of their Children Looked After Social Worker in a manner which demonstrated that they had regular contact and were confident and comfortable in speaking with the worker. Carers' files showed that supervising social workers ensure that they also meet regularly with young people. Children's responses in the Commission's questionnaire showed that they felt very confident that both carers and social workers listened to them.

As a result of a consultative exercise with Children Looked After a small number of young people have formed a group called 'Speaker Box' .It is intended that this group will play an active role in planning for Children Looked After. They have met with Social Work Teams and have created '10 Golden rules' to be followed by social workers working with Looked After Children. The young people have presented these to the Corporate Parenting Panel. The group has also produced the first issue of a newsletter which includes a statement of its aims including 'developing participation' and 'working in partnership with Social Services to assist them with consultations of Looked After Children and Care Leavers'.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at outcomes for standards 14 & 29.

The service takes steps to ensure that each young person is helped to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for leading a successful independent adult life. Carers receive prompt payment of allowances and expenses.

EVIDENCE:

Children's files showed that the service ensures that each young person is referred to the 16+ team at an appropriate time. They are allocated a Personal Adviser who replaces the Children Looked After Social Worker as the designated worker offering support and guidance to the young person as they move towards independent living. The Personal Adviser helps the young person complete a Pathway Plan which covers a range of issues which are important with respect to this process including education/training; housing and finance/budgeting. The service ensures that young people are placed on the housing list at an early stage. This process involves 'bidding' for properties via a computer link. The 16+ premises have good computer resources and personal advisers will help young people with the housing process. The 16+ team also has teachers from the Children Looked After Education Team and links to the Connexions service for employment advice and guidance. The premises also have a large kitchen where young people can be helped to develop cooking skills. Some cookery sessions are presented by carers.

The inspectors attended a training session for applicants to foster which focussed on the process of young people moving on into independent living and was presented by members of the 16+ team and a carer and two young people who had moved on from her care. Approved carers receive an extensive training course designed to help them understand the requirements of the Leaving Care Act, the work of the 16+ Team and their own role in preparing

the young person for independence. Foster carers are given plans to help them work with the young person on practical skills required for independent living and these plans are reviewed at Childcare and Pathway reviews.

It was apparent from attendance at the pre- approval training session described above, from visits to carers homes and from conversations with carers at their support group, that the young people in their care were emotionally secure in the knowledge that when they left to live in independent accommodation they could remain in contact with their carers who would continue to offer them personal support. However there was some feedback from carers, supervising social workers and young people which indicated that carers and young people would welcome more understanding from 16+ workers with respect to the emotional and psychological issues involved in young people separating out from their carer family. Fostering staff and the 16+ Team Manager acknowledged that Children Looked After have to face these issues at a much earlier age than young people in birth families. The Fostering Service Manager has stated that a number of meetings are planned to consider these issues.

The Fostering Services Finance Officer attends carer training to provide information about allowances and related finance issues. They also attend carer meetings and team meetings and have taken steps to ensure that social workers fully understand the administrative processes relating to finance. Carers confirmed that they received allowances regularly and on time. One carer said that they had been provided with extra funding for appropriate toys for a placed child. There is a 'petty cash' system which is available for emergencies e.g. the need for temporary allowances at the time of placement breakdown and emergency placement in a new care home. Fostering social workers 'trigger' payment of holiday allowances and other special payments at the appropriate times.

Management

The intended outcomes 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, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at outcomes for standards 2,4,5,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26, & 28.

The service is efficiently managed by skilled staff with relevant experience and qualifications. The staff team consists of an adequate number of experienced and qualified staff who are well supported and supervised. There are clear systems for working with carers who receive good training, supervision and support. There are monitoring systems in place to ensure the efficient maintenance of children's files. Financial processes are sound.

EVIDENCE:

The Service Manager has a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, a degree in Business Studies, certificates in Management Studies and Health and Social Services Management and has commenced a Diploma in Health and Social Services Management. They have held management positions in Social Work Departments since 1986. Prior to undertaking this post they were Team Manager for a Looked After Children team.

The Team Manager has worked in the Fostering Service for 19 years. There are two appropriately qualified and experienced Practice Managers

Meetings with staff at all levels within the service and with carers showed that they had been provided with clear information and guidance about procedures and felt confident about being able to receive clarification about any issues about which they were uncertain. Reading of files and other documents showed that there were good systems in place for the monitoring of the work of the service at all levels.

Carers' files were clearly organised and well maintained. Children's files were well-maintained with evidence of monitoring by management. This process had revealed that one child's file had not had adequate written records or a copy of review notes. This had been noted by the manager and swift action taken to remedy the gaps. The Service Manager also stated their intention to address this issue. They explained that steps are being taken to employ a worker to further develop Quality Assurance in the service.

Apart from management the team consists of a Senior Practitioner and 12 social workers. All except two, who have many years experience with the service, are qualified. Other staff had relevant past experience or transferable skills before joining the service. Two staff are locums. In addition there is a Practice Manager and a Social Worker who are employed on a casual basis.

It was reported that workloads have increased over the last year but that managers are proactive in supporting staff with workload management. A recent recruitment drive was unsuccessful in attracting appropriately experienced social work staff so the managers of the service are exploring a range of possibilities to fill vacant social work posts.

All social workers carry out both assessment and supervisory social work. Staff said that they felt very well-supported by management who would, if approached for help, take steps to reduce caseloads and/or help workers prioritise their workload. New workers are given a reduced workload and 'led in gradually'. They are also provided with a good induction programme. Staff also said that there were very good opportunities for training with access to Post-

Qualifying Awards. One worker said they were being allowed to take a day off each week in order to work for the Advanced Award in Social Work. Two were being supported to take the employment route towards professional qualifications. There was a general agreement that, if they approached management with a good reason for being allowed to take up a particular area of training, the service would provide the necessary funding.

It was clear throughout the inspection that the staff at all levels were very dedicated to providing a high level of support to carers and that the service has clear expectations with respect to the processes involved in working with carers. Carers' files showed that supervising social workers carry out monthly visits which are structured to ensure that all relevant areas relating to Children Looked After are considered as well as the developmental needs of the carers. There was also written evidence of additional visits and of regular telephone contact from social workers. Carers' Annual Reviews are carried out efficiently and include attention to training needs. There is an appropriate training programme in place for carers which includes access to NVQ 3. Some carers, who work outside the home, indicated that they would welcome the provision of weekend training sessions.

It was also clear that many of the fostering service staff offer support to carers beyond that which is officially required. One carer had looked after a young person with a chronic health condition and spoke of the service, especially the supervising social worker, providing practical and sensitive support. Another carer wrote in their questionnaire response 'my link worker is a true professional – very supportive and really cares about the children. She listens and when there are problems she deals with them quickly and efficiently'. There are also opportunities for informal social contact between carers and social workers. The inspectors visited a lively and relaxed Coffee Morning for carers attended by social workers where it was apparent that there was mutual respect and enjoyment of each other's company. The Head of Children's Services, Managers, staff and carers also spoke enthusiastically of a recent social event including two pantomime trips, a trip to Butlins in the summer and an awards ceremony for foster carers.

The service is located in a purpose-built block in an appropriate location which is easily accessible to public transport links. Staff work in a large open-plan office which provides adequate space, lighting and office equipment. There are lockable cabinets for the storage of confidential information. There is a conference room which, during the inspection, was used in a formal manner on one occasion for a panel meeting and at a later date was skilfully transformed to provide a more informal atmosphere for a Carers' coffee Morning.

The Principal finance Officer provided information which demonstrated that the service has clear financial procedures and accounting processes which ensure financial viability.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	4
29	3

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

Yes

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	FS30	20	Panel member files must be up to date, and include CRB checks, references and personal profiles or CV's. The previous timescale was 30/7/05. The Registered Person made a commitment to ensure this is met by 31.3.06, the CSCI must be informed that this has been complied with.	30/06/06

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	FE6	That the Registered Provider continues to take steps to ensure that no placed child has to share a bedroom with a carer's birth child.
2	FS19	That the Registered Provider continues to take steps to ensure that social workers in the Children Looked After team develop a full and sensitive understanding of the

		nature of the fostering role.
3	FS19	That the Registered Provider continues to take steps to ensure that staff from the 16+ Team understand the psychological and emotional issues involved for placed children and carers' families when preparing Children Looked After for independent living.
4	FS23	That the Registered Provider explores methods of improving the availability of training for carers who, because of work commitments, cannot attend sessions during Monday to Friday.

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