



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Lincolnshire County Council Fostering Service

**Lincolnshire County Council
Social Services Directorate, Orchard House
Orchard Street
Lincoln
LN1 1BA**

Lead Inspector
Jane Barton

Announced Inspection
7th February 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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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 Lincolnshire County Council Fostering Service

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Lincoln
LN1 1BA

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Provider Web address www.lincolnshire.gov.uk

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Lincolnshire County Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mr Philip Hunt

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 2nd February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Lincolnshire Local Authority Fostering Service sets out within its Statement of Purpose the aim to 'provide a range of foster carers able to meet the emotional, physical, cultural, religious and ethnicity needs of all the children looked after by the local authority'.

These placements include the following types of carers:

Task centred, Respite Care, Permanent, Specialist Carers for children with disabilities, Placement Plus Carers for children with challenging behaviour, Kinship Carers, and a small number of carers are available to provide emergency placements.

The number of Approved Foster Carers provided by the service was 253 and the number of placements being provided was 353 at the time of inspection.

The service operates within Lincolnshire County Council, Social Services Directorate. This is split into three geographical areas, South (Sleaford), West (Lincoln) and East (Louth). The County Manager for Children Looked After and Regulated Services has specific responsibility for the Family Placement Services and is the Local Authority's nominated manager for this service.

The Family Placement Staff are based in a number of Social Service Area Offices throughout Lincolnshire. The service has a dedicated duty system, based in the Lincoln Area Office to deal with enquiries. The family placement staff are responsible for undertaking the foster carer's assessments and taking these to the Fostering Panel.

The Fostering Service also employs a number of Placement Support Workers who provide direct support, including some respite day care, to carers.

SUMMARY

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

Two inspectors, who spent 3 days inspecting the service, carried out this inspection. Visits were carried out to 4 foster homes, where carers and fostered children were spoken with. Inspectors also met with groups of foster carers, and fostered children and young people. Inspectors spoke with family placement officers, support staff, practice managers, service managers, and the county manager responsible for managing the service. The fostering service covers 3 areas in Lincolnshire, East, West and South, and all offices were visited. Files and records were examined. Inspectors received completed questionnaires from 15 young people, 9 foster carers and 6 placing officers. Fostering and children's records were examined within the case tracking process.

The inspection focussed on key fostering standards, in addition to which any standards against which there had been requirements or recommendations at the previous inspection.

Typical quotes from young people from the questionnaires in respect of the best thing about fostering included 'I love my foster placement', 'they would look after me no matter what', and 'the best thing about fostering is not being let down'.

What the service does well:

This is a service which provides a high quality of care within a family setting for children and young people who are unable to live within their own families.

A revised and updated Statement of Purpose has been produced which clearly outlines the aims, objectives and principles of the fostering service.

There is excellent management monitoring and overview of the service.

Recruitment processes are robust, and the service employs experienced, knowledgeable and skilled staff who are clear about their roles and responsibilities.

The service gives a high priority to promoting the educational achievement of fostered children, and there are a range of innovative opportunities for fostered young people to participate in arts based projects, which both ensure effective consultation, and develop social skills.

What has improved since the last inspection?

A review of foster carer allowances has been carried out and these have been significantly increased for mainstream carers.

Guidance for foster carers in preparation for adulthood has been produced.

The supervision process for foster carers has been developed.

A new policy is in place which addresses disagreements in Panel.

What they could do better:

Foster carers need to have regular opportunities to update their child protection training. Child Protection guidance should be addressed within the Foster Carers' Handbook.

The record of the matching process should be separated from the general records, so that monitoring of any issues can be made easier.

Expenses payable to foster carers, and how to claim them, need to be clarified.

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Fostered children felt their health needs were well met, and the local authority are developing several strategies to ensure robust health provision for Looked After Children.

EVIDENCE:

Children and young people spoken with said they were taken to see doctors and dentists as necessary. A foster carer who was visited during the inspection, described in detail the provision made to meet the complex health needs of a fostered child with a disability. All the children who responded to questionnaires were able to describe a range of ways they were being encouraged to stay healthy and look after themselves, such as being provided with a healthy diet, and being enabled to participate in sports such as swimming and horse-riding. Up to date written health records were not kept by carers in respect of all fostered children and young people.

Carers described attending first aid courses, although a significant number seemed not to have had recent refresher training.

There is a designated nurse for Looked after Children (LAC), and a designated paediatrician is to be recruited in the near future.

Panel membership includes a Community Psychiatric Nurse, who is also available to attend foster carer support groups. Fostered children requiring mental health services are able to access this through a fast-track system to Camhs.

The local authority has also launched a software programme called LifeCard, which allows a child or young person access to their personal life story information, including health records. Familiarisation training for key staff and selected foster carers commenced during this inspection.

A training resource – Carers Toolkit – was launched in June 2005, which addresses the challenges facing LAC and aims to raise awareness of their health and other needs. The target audience includes foster carers, and there will be a repeat theatre tour in March 2006. The resulting DVD 'Jack and his journey through care' has been circulated to a range of local authorities, health and educational professionals, for use as training material.

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

Recruitment processes are carried out to a high standard, and the fostering service is staffed by well-qualified and experienced staff who are suitable to work with children and young people.

An effective placement reviewing process is in place and fostered children have a range of people they can speak to.

EVIDENCE:

The Manager of the service has been assessed by the Commission to be suitable to manage. Recruitment files of Managers within the service have been examined previously or at this inspection. Records evidence that CRB checks are carried out on a 3-year rolling programme in respect of all staff employed, and references are followed up appropriately. Appropriate records are kept of the recruitment process.

Files were examined and contained evidence of annual inspection of foster homes, including health and safety assessments and unannounced visits. Family Placement Officers (FPOs) and foster carers described a thorough process. All the foster homes seen during the inspection were warm, comfortable, clean, and appropriately furnished to meet the needs of the

children living there. Written guidelines outlining foster carers' responsibility for health and safety are contained in the Foster Carers' Handbook.

Children's files contained thorough assessment of their needs, and discussion with staff revealed that information sharing takes place to support the matching process. Discussion with FPO's revealed that placement choice can be significantly restricted due to the numbers of placements being requested, however, children described benefiting from careful planning and timely introductions into their new home. File records addressed the elements of matching, which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement, however it was not easy to track progress on support to address any gaps in the match between the carer and the child. All the placing officers who responded to the questionnaires reported that the children were being looked after very well (5) or well (1).

Children spoken with during the inspection stated they feel safe in their placements. 'They would look after me no matter what', 'I'm getting treated fairly by my carer' were comments from questionnaires. Children knew how to make a complaint, and were able to identify somebody they would tell about being bullied, should this happen. Some were able to describe how bullying had been successfully addressed by carers.

All LAC placed in foster care are reviewed in line with statutory requirements by a team of independent reviewing officers. Children placed with independent fostering providers are monitored by the assistant director on a monthly basis. The Manager of the fostering service is the lead counter signatory for all foster carer related CRB checks. Lincolnshire's Safeguarding Children Board was formally launched in January 2006, changing the strategic focus of child protection.

An effective system is in place for reporting of allegations of abuse or neglect to the Manager. Records were examined and found to evidence appropriate responses to child protection concerns and complaints. Since the last inspection there had been 3 child protection investigations in respect of fostered children, and 6 complaints. Records were clear and thorough and identified actions and outcomes, where these had been completed. The Manager demonstrated a thorough awareness of this information, which is regularly monitored.

Safe caring guidelines are provided in the Foster Carers' Handbook, which also contains useful information about bullying, and action to take if a foster child goes missing from home.

Foster carers spoken with during the inspection had knowledge of how to appropriately respond to disclosures of abuse, although many had not received refresher training in child protection, and the handbook contained no specific guidance in respect of responding to or reporting of disclosures.

7 recruitment files were inspected at random, these included newly appointed staff. The files evidenced that recruitment processes had been carried out to a high standard, CRB checks were up to date in all cases, and telephone enquiries had been made in response to written references. Files were well organised. All staff spoken with during the inspection demonstrated a high level of skill and experience and had attained appropriate professional qualifications for their positions. Post qualifying training is available to staff, many of whom had undertaken this. Unqualified staff working in the service have a high level of experience, and are appropriately supervised.

An inspector attended panel, which was observed to be quorate, and to address relevant points when considering approval of foster carers. A new policy is in place to address disagreements at panel. The advisor to panel, who was new in post at the last inspection, had visited another area's panel since the last inspection, and formed networks with colleagues across the East Midlands region. In addition to this he has undertaken Child Protection Foundation Training.

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,

The education of fostered children is promoted well by the service. Staff and carers have a sound understanding of valuing diversity and equality.

EVIDENCE:

A training course has been made available for all staff in the service, aimed at promoting their understanding of race and diversity issues. All managers have undertaken this, and staff are in the process of attending. A FPO who had attended was able to describe how fostered children could be supported to develop skills to deal with discrimination, and described work with carers to enhance the sense of identity and self-esteem of a fostered child from an ethnic minority.

File records, and discussion with staff and carers revealed specific services, provided and planned, to meet the complex needs of a disabled child, and several examples were available of consideration being given to assist with adaptations to carers' homes to meet the needs of other children with profound disabilities. The service has carers who have specific experience of caring for unaccompanied young people from a range of countries. Liaison with education services has taken place to ensure appropriate language support where necessary.

3 out of 4 sample Form Fs examined addressed diversity.

Fostered children and young people said they receive help from their carers with school work, such as access to the Internet, use of revision guides, and help with homework. Carers described liaising regularly with school, and using home-school books to communicate with school staff. Module 2 of the carers' training programme, addresses how foster carers can contribute to the assessment of the child's educational needs, and provide an environment in which they can learn. An education programme is in place for all children and young people who are fostered. A new Personal Education Plan (PEP), designed in consultation with young people, was launched in May 2005. Files examined contained minutes of relevant meetings with educational professionals and PEPs.

A multi agency team, comprising educational co-ordinators, school staff, social care workers and employees from Connexions, provide active monitoring and support for all LAC in Key stage 4. Carers receive a regular newsletter, which updates on progress on educational issues for LAC. An education support worker has been established to work alongside carers to produce education plans, and to reduce the risk of exclusions.

Fostered children and their carers in Lincolnshire can become involved in a range of innovative projects using arts and creativity programmes to enable LAC to develop self confidence, and participate in activities which are socially inclusive. These projects include a NACRO Fun in the Sun project, a national citizenship and life skills programme, known as Life Routes, One Jam, which combines gospel R n B with filming, photography, lyric and song writing, and a proposed heritage project, Young Roots, which looks at the facial reconstruction of an Anglo Saxon Skull, found locally. These projects provide opportunities for young people to widen their social interaction, and develop a range of creative and artistic skills.

The service does not provide short-term breaks.

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

Clear arrangements for consultation of fostered children and young people are in place and these work well.

EVIDENCE:

Children described how they have had changes made to their contact arrangements when these have been requested. All carers spoken with demonstrated a good understanding of how contact can be effectively promoted. Some carers described supervising contact within their homes, where appropriate, or transporting children to contact. Children were encouraged to make telephone calls or write letters to family. FPOs were able to describe carers who have taken on a more pro-active role in enabling parents to learn about their child's developing needs. Files contained records of outcomes of contact meetings, and their perceived impact on the child. Statutory LAC reviews addressed the issue of whether contact arrangements meet the assessed needs of the child.

Young people spoken with, and respondents to the questionnaires were all able to give examples of how they were consulted, both about their daily life, and their care plans in general. All fostered children spoken with, and 13 out of 15 respondents to the questionnaires said they knew how to make a complaint. Every respondent said their opinion was asked for by their carers in respect of a range of issues, including, what colour to decorate various rooms in the house, where to go on holiday, what food to eat, etc. An independent Children's rights and advocacy service is provided by NYAS, and fostered children were aware of this service. The arts, music and drama based projects described above also provide extensive opportunities for consultation and

participation of fostered young people. Files contained documents recording the views of children, collected for Statutory Reviews.

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)

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

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

14,29

Support is available to fostered young people, to prepare them for adulthood. Fostering allowances have been increased to fostering network rates.

EVIDENCE:

Carers spoken with had attended leaving care training, and spoke positively about it. Older young people talked about their plans for leaving care, and described ongoing independence work. FPO's described the use of placement support workers to encourage and enable young people in acquiring skills for independence. The authority has a service level agreement with NCH Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service who provide a leaving care service for young people from 16 onwards.

A range of workshops are planned for fostered young people which aim to address a range of issues young people need to consider who are preparing to leave care. The Manager stated that 94% of care leavers have a pathway plan in place.

Care leavers from Lincolnshire were quoted in the November 2005 edition of the Children Now publication, describing effective support they had received from leaving care services.

There has been a recent decision to increase fostering allowances for mainstream carers to become in line with fostering network rates, with effect from April 2006. Managers of the service expressed the view that this increase was a positive message to carers about the valuable resource they represent. There was a range of views expressed by carers in respect of allowances and payment of expenses. Carers described differing experiences of expenses

being paid and how to access them. The advice they received about how to claim appeared to be inconsistent.

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

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

1,4,17,18,22,23

There is excellent management monitoring and overview of the service.

EVIDENCE:

The Executive of the County Council has approved an updated Statement of Purpose (SOP) with effect from 15th February 2006. This document identifies clearly the aims, objectives and principles of the fostering service, and is well laid out and accessible. Changes to the SOP include explanation of the standards of care, giving information about the group with responsibility for ensuring improvements are made, information about the process for approving and reviewing of placements in the independent sector, clarification of information about training modules and support to foster carers, and updating of information relating to CSCI, NYAS and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Two children's guides to the fostering service are available, which summarise what the service sets out to do for children. The majority of children spoken with, and responding to questionnaires said they had received written information about the service when they were first fostered.

All managers spoken with were able to demonstrate a high level of knowledge of issues pertinent to the service, and robust methods of ensuring quality performance were seen. A process of management auditing of files was evidenced. Monthly Fostering Inspection Group meetings are held to address adherence to National Minimum Standards, and ensure effective communication and address consistency issues between the three areas. Managers demonstrated clarity of roles and responsibilities at interview, and there were clear arrangements for deputising in place.

Inspection of records, and discussion with staff and managers revealed that the service is staffed by appropriately experienced and qualified workers who meet the needs of the service. Contingencies are in place to manage vacancies. There are a significant number of staff who have been working in the fostering service for a number of years. Assessments of carers are carried out competently, addressing relevant qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering.

Staff interviewed described robust supervision processes, and records examined supported this view. Carers felt well supported by FPOs. Of carers responding to the questionnaires, one reported they did not get enough support. Although the majority of carers felt that there were insufficient staff in the fostering service, they were very satisfied with the support they receive, typical comments being, 'they do an excellent job', 'always willing to help', and 'the team at Louth are second to none'. Carers were able to describe being able to access support out of hours, however this is through the emergency duty team and not specifically a service for carers.

A supervision policy is in place and contained within the foster carers' handbook. The foster care agreement addresses the requirement for supervision. Carers spoken with demonstrated an understanding of the function of supervision, and the need for it to be recorded. Files contained evidence of supervision agreements, and records of meetings. All carers have a named and qualified social worker available to supervise them.

The size, geographical location, and rural status of Lincolnshire represents a significant challenge to the organisation of training for foster carers who are scattered across a large area, and this has been a contributory factor to low take-up of courses offered in the past. A system is now in place to monitor participation by carers at training events. Existing carers are involved in pre-approval training, and newly approved carers said they found this to be a particularly informative aspect of the training. Post approval training is provided in 3 ways. Special interest seminars are being offered on a rolling programme in a variety of venues across the county, which cover issues such as: Safe Care, Identity; and Challenging Behaviour. Inspectors attended the introduction of a Seminar covering Autistic Spectrum Disorders, which appeared to be well attended. Foster carers, through nomination via their FPO, are invited to attend in-service training courses from both within the social services annual development plan, and independently commissioned courses. Thirdly, an in house modular programme has been devised specifically for foster carers, consisting of 9 modules available in paper and electronic formats, and delivered by distance learning, in recognition that many foster carers find it difficult to attend courses. Training needs are identified at the foster carers' annual review, and the effectiveness of the current training programme is being evaluated by the FIG group. Foster carers spoken with talked positively about courses they had attended during the year since the last inspection.

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	4
6	3
8	3
9	3
15	4
30	3

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

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	3
29	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? NO

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS12	The fostering service provider to ensure that all foster carers are provided with a written health record for all children, which can be updated throughout the placement.
2.	FS12	The fostering service provider to ensure that all foster carers are provided with refresher first aid training at appropriate intervals.
3.	FS8	The fostering service provider to develop a process for recording matching considerations and to identify gaps in matching for future monitoring.
4.	FS9	The fostering service provider to ensure that child protection guidance be included in the Foster Carers' Handbook, specifically how to appropriately respond to and report disclosures of abuse.
5.	FS9	The fostering service provider to ensure that regular refresher Child Protection training is made available to all foster carers.
6.	FS7	The fostering service provider to ensure that diversity is

		addressed in all Form F assessments.
7.	FS29	The fostering service provider to ensure that information relating to expenses payable and how to access them is conveyed clearly and consistently to foster carers.
8.	FS18	The fostering service provider to develop a formalised system for providing out of hours management and support to foster carers

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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