



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

City of Salford Family Placement Service

**Avon House
Avon Close
Little Hulton
Manchester
M28 0LA**

Lead Inspector

Lolly Warren, Maria McGranaghan

Announced Inspection

22nd February 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	City of Salford Family Placement Service
Address	Avon House Avon Close Little Hulton Manchester M28 0LA
Telephone number	0161 799 1762
Fax number	0161 790 4892
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	City of Salford Community & Social Services
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Carolyn Williams
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 25th November 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Salford Family Placement Team provides the fostering and adoption service for the City of Salford. It provides short term, long term and permanent placements for children "looked after" by the City of Salford. It also provides short-term breaks for children with disabilities and children in need or at risk of being "looked after". This inspection concentrated on the fostering element of the service.

The fostering service has responsibility for recruitment, assessment, approval and support of foster carers coupled with appropriate matching of placements for children accessing the service. The service will ensure resources are available to foster carers, such as additional support to the child / young person, to ensure where possible the placement made is maintained.

It is a centralised based team, located in an office in Little Hulton in Salford. This building also accommodates the Child Protection Unit and the service for the management of the residential children's homes.

SUMMARY

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

This was the annual announced inspection of the service and the inspection took place on 22 February 2006 over a period of 4 days and during that time the inspectors met with the Principle Manager, Team Managers, Social Workers, Family Placement Workers, representatives of Salford Foster Care Association, Administrative Staff and Panel Administrators. The inspection process also included the attendance of a foster carers' support group, observation of the fostering Panel and a meeting with a children's group, outside of the above time frame.

Meetings took place with foster carers at their homes. The foster carers spoke about the process of becoming a foster carer and the support and training that was on offer to them. Children that were placed with the foster carers seen, were being well cared for and appeared happy and content. It was evident that liaison between the carers and the service was consistent and this was viewed as positive by carers met, who felt that the good communication between themselves and the service had a positive impact on the placement for the child.

Salford Fostering Service was seen to be offering a good service to both the children and young people placed in foster care and the foster carers looking after them.

Questionnaires were also sent to foster carers and children/young people and their responses are included in various sections of this report.

What the service does well:

Salford Fostering Service has a history of being able to retain foster carer's. There are many carers' who have been fostering for a number of years and have seen the children grow and mature and move on as adults. A discussion with one foster carer took place and she said, "we" promote a feeling for the children and young people that they belong to a family, whilst still knowing they have a birth family", thus ensuring that the child / young person maintains their 'identity' and develops an understanding of their situation.

The fostering service was seen to offer the children/young people placed with the necessary support. Young people met at the children's group spoke about being in foster care; feeling safe and that they are looked after well. One particular young person commented that "we are looked after too well sometimes".

The foster carers spoken to felt that the support and information sharing on the whole was good. Many indicated that they felt 'part of a team' and this helped towards the positive care of the child / young person.

The service has developed the training available to foster carers. This includes a preparation group and induction training. This training includes targeted areas such as, Child Protection, Diversity, Health Care Needs and responding to negative behaviour. In addition, the foster carers are offered further support from the looked after children's nurse, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team (CAMS) and Salford Therapy and Referral service for looked after children (STRAR-LAC). This training and additional support was seen to focus on positive outcomes for the children and young people.

Foster carers are regularly assessed in the core competences outlined at their induction and these are reviewed by the family placement worker and at the foster carers' annual review. It was seen that training is given a high priority by the service, which therefore has a positive impact on the services being offered to the children/young people.

Family placement workers talked about what they considered the service did well. They said, "we have good knowledge of child protection, keeping children safe and knowledge of foster carers. We feel we have very positive and supportive management structures, and that our collective different strengths assist in sharing knowledge within the team, and therefore improve the outcomes. We have a proud record of foster carers' feeling they want to stay with Salford and that they belong, you do not get this everywhere". This was a view shared by the placement social workers, the team managers and Salford Foster Care Association.

One worker said, "it is a dynamic authority that responds to the changing needs within a tight budget and not as a token gesture."

It was evident that clear management structures were in place and all staff knew the structure of the service. The principle manager was clear about the strengths of the service whilst balancing these with areas for improvement that would positively affect the outcomes for children and young people.

A selection of files relating to foster carers and foster children were seen. The files contained well-documented information and were organised in a clear and managed way.

The fostering Panel has developed and provides for the quality assurance of the assessments and reports to the Panel.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection, the service had appointed 2 of the assigned 3 workers who have specific responsibilities for working with family and friend carers. These workers offer guidance, support and assessment of these carers in order that a child may be placed within the nuclear family where appropriate and that the carers receive the service they require.

The friends and family support workers have also developed viability assessment of these carers in order that the placements can be quickly assessed to determine if the child's needs can be met and maintained within this placement.

The appointment of the family and friends support workers is viewed as a very positive move and is valued by the fostering team. It is pleasing that family and friend potential carers are being given specific consideration in order that the child maintains some continuity within his / her own family.

There has been some restructuring of the children's services and this has created two distinct teams:

Children's services

- Residential and fostering services.
- LAC Social work team
- STARLAC
- Activities coordinator.

Inclusion services

- Duty and investigation team.
- Child protection and court team,
- Long Term Looked After Team

The splitting of the teams enables easier access to services and enhances communication between the teams.

The service was seen to have improved the way in which foster carers learn. For example, a discussion with the Foster Care Association took place and they said, "they have taken on learning mentors, for new carer's to help them with their training, especially if they have been out of a training environment for some time, this has been seen as really positive and takes some of the stress of learning away from new carer's who feel more supported".

The payment for skills initiative has improved the number of foster carers attending training. A discussion with the team managers took place and they said, "it is felt that the foster carer's have now grasped that it is a learning process being measured by the review process, and the foster carers can see the improvements in the way that they offer services to the young people". Foster carers' spoken to commented that the payment for skills initiative, enhances their role as fosters and demonstrated the importance of the role so that they feel valued by the service.

What they could do better:

Although the appointment of the family and friend placement social workers was seen as a valuable contribution to the team, concerns were expressed by members of the team that this service is at risk of becoming an 'assessment service', which would impact on the support and guidance being offered presently to family and friends carers, which in turn could impact on the outcome for the children/young people.

The service needed to appoint a permanent recruitment officer. It is important that this post is filled and that special attention is given to recruiting a diverse range of carers, as this was seen to be an area that the service must improve. The recruitment of foster carers from different cultural backgrounds would support the matching of children from Black, Asian or mixed backgrounds and to offer a service that is evidently more tailored to individual needs.

The building remains a concern for this service. Workers are cramped and it was suggested that foster carers have difficulty in finding the offices. In addition the service is unable to provide training to carers at the office, due to limited space. Finding alternative and appropriate venues for training is expensive and time consuming. The authority must consider the issues in relation to this building and the service that is being provided in such restricted conditions.

There appeared to be no method to safeguard young people accessing foster carer's personal computers, and concerns had been raised after one young person accessed a particular internet site on a foster carer's personal computer. The service must review the training and induction procedures for all new foster carers to ensure the appropriate parental locks are applied to personal computers to make certain young people are not exposed to inappropriate photography or literature.

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

12

There are a variety of services and training opportunities made available to the foster carer's to assist in recognising and acting upon the health care needs of the child. The health care needs of the child are reviewed regularly and the carer's competence is assessed against how these needs are addressed.

EVIDENCE:

Salford foster care service employs two Health Needs Co-ordinators whose specific responsibility relates to the health care needs of Looked After Children. In addition, and to complement this service, there is a 'Child and Adolescent Mental Health team and a STARLAC team providing therapeutic support to children and their foster carers through training, consultation, support and direct work.

The service provides training to foster carers that includes health promotion issues; this is detailed in the preparation and induction training given to all foster carers. To date 48 foster carer's have received First Aid training, and it is this training and the identification of specific competences of foster carers that enables the effective monitoring of children's and young peoples' health care needs.

Information in relation to the health care needs of the individual children and young people is clearly recorded on the Care Plan and other Looked After Children documentation that was seen on the young person's file. A discussion with a foster carer confirmed that they are in receipt of this information at the point of the placement, or immediately afterwards.

A discussion with the family placement workers took place and they said, "there is good training specifically on health, healthy eating, and annual medical reviews. Carers are very good at ensuring that appointments are kept. The Star LAC team also offers carers support and provide training on

parenting. Information is shared with the carers about how they can access the relevant health provision and training and this includes the Looked After Children's Nurse who will support the carers and the children". During a visit to foster carers the topic of health was raised and discussed. The foster carer said, "I have attended lots of training, including looking after the health care needs of children, I found it all very interesting. The social worker calls every now and then to check the child is ok and that they have attended appointments and things, it all goes towards your skills review in the end, so its good for the child and the carer".

The responses from the young peoples' questionnaires demonstrated that they felt their health needs were promoted and considered and that they were well looked after and that their health needs were being consistently considered.

The overall picture was that Salford fostering service was ensuring that young peoples' health needs were been reviewed and continually assessed.

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

6, 8, 9, 15, 30

There are appropriate systems in place to check the suitability of potential foster carers, to ensure safe and appropriate matching. This includes the formal assessment and monitoring of foster carer/placement. Foster carers receive training on matters of keeping a child safe and Child Protection as part of their induction to foster care and a rolling programme of training has been developed to enhance the awareness in this area.

EVIDENCE:

The Principle Manager, Carolyn Williams, has been the manager since April 1999 and was a team leader in the service from April 1992. She has worked in family placement since 1988 and therefore has a standing knowledge in the field of family placement. Ms Williams has a social work qualification and completed an NVQ Level 5 Award in Strategic Management in March 2004.

Members of the team were clear in their understanding of the function and running of the service and the foster carers also showed a clear understanding of the team's responsibilities.

There is a system in place to assess the suitability of foster carers, and this starts with the gathering of basic information at the point of interest being shown that would question the space within the home and the number of people sharing the home. An information pack is then sent out and a visit

arranged at the person's home. Although this information is not used as part of the assessment it was noted that valuable information can be gained at this point that can determine if the potential carer's can offer suitable care to a child.

A discussion with the family placement workers took place and they said, "we have a form that is used as part of the initial information gathering, at the same time those making contact with the service would be informed that the assessment would include interviewing ex-partners, what the service would expect of the carers. This was done so as to enable prospective foster carers the opportunity to assess and reflect for themselves whether they are making the decision at this time to be a foster carer for the right reasons". Examples were given of people having emotional or financial problems and had looked to foster a child as a means of solving their problems.

During the inspection a number of foster carers' files were assessed. The Form F documents seen were comprehensive and detailed good information about the foster carer and their ability to care for a foster child. A variety of checks were undertaken as part of the assessment process and the outcome was evidenced on the files. This included Criminal Records Bureau check. Other examples seen were the Health and Safety checklist that is completed as part of the assessment process. This is further updated annually at the foster carers' review. An additional assessment takes place to ensure that any prospective foster carer's home is of an adequate standard to care for a child, ensuring there is enough space to accommodate a child / children

Safety equipment, adaptations and equipment for babies such as such as beds, prams, safety gates and cupboard locks are provided to the foster carers. On the whole foster carers felt that the equipment provided was adequate, although some felt that the quality of equipment such as a pram was sometimes in a poor state of repair with the potential to compromise the child's safety. This matter was raised with the team manager who indicated that this should not happen. The service should review the arrangements in place for the allocation of equipment.

Risk assessment information is collected as part of the referral process and this is taken into account in the matching process to assist the carer to be aware of issues that may impact on the placement, with appropriate strategies in place to manage any risk posed, assisting the child / young person to understand what risk is, and have their safety and well-being maintained.

The review process requires the family placement worker to complete an annual health and safety check to consider the transport arrangements for children placed and check relevant documentation, and address any issues relating to standards in the home. Unannounced visits also take place and these are checked through the review process.

Overall the service had clear systems and assessments in place to assess the suitability of foster carers in order that they would provide a quality home for the young person being placed in their care.

The manager provided written information prior to the inspection taking place and this included information on the process of matching and states "recruitment and publicity literature demonstrates an inclusive approach to the recruitment of foster carers from ethnic minorities. Images used in publicity are diverse to reflect the range of foster carers needed. There is a thorough process for matching long term foster placements, including consideration of the child's placement needs and linking at the adoption panel and performance of long term placements. Matching meetings involve all the relevant professionals and give thorough consideration to the information about the child's background and placement needs and the support needed for the placement".

Discussions took place with the family placement workers team who commented, "there can be conflict in trying to ensure that children are appropriately matched in relation to the background this was not always possible and it is about getting the balance right. If you consider that the carer would not meet the child's needs we would not then place the child with the carer or if the carer express or demonstrate negative views of a child's background we would certainly not be looking to match a child from a minority background with this carer".

The matching process for long-term placements was seen to ensure that all available information is given to foster carers prior to the placement being agreed. Introductions take place for all new long-term placements and there was an expectation that this occurs for short-term placements if the placement is planned. A discussion with the family placement team took place regarding the placement of infants and they said, "where babies are concerned we ideally look for a placement in the community where the child is from but we recognise that the shortage of carer's occasionally means that we would have to look for the next best thing, which could mean an outside placement".

The matter of placing children / young people from different cultural backgrounds was discussed with the family placement workers and they said, "there are situations when we have to place a Black child in a White family, and the family placement workers' knowledge of the carer is therefore crucial. We have to consider the level of support that the carer will require and the support that will be made available. One of the big issues is to ensure that the carer has insight of the issues around identify, customs and culture to be able to support the child."

Further discussion took place regarding the issue of matching and the difficulties experienced due to the limited number of foster carers. The social

workers said, "children are sometimes placed out of necessity, we do try to make sure it is the correct placement but social workers are under pressure to place, especially when the need of the child is viewed as high".

The matching of a child/ young person needing a placement in an emergency situation was seen as difficult as the aim was to assess availability and ensure that the child is safe and secure. It was evident that it is not easy to place a child in an emergency that will meet all their needs. However, it was pleasing that the process of consultation with parents during this time was not lost. A discussion with the social work team took place and they said, "we can't ignore the consultation process between the carer and parent, even if the parents have been poor parents their views are still important, if the parents are involved in how the residency is made etc, this makes the placement easier and a more positive outcome for the child.

All foster carers are expected to have a Safe Care Policy updated annually as part of the foster carers' review process. Information is provided to the prospective foster carer during the preparation and assessment process. It makes clear that corporal punishment is not acceptable, and guidance is given on managing inappropriate behaviour. Foster carers receive training that covers issues of Child Protection and risk assessment to safeguard the well-being of the young people. A discussion took place with the family placement workers who said, "we do visits and will assess any changes in the household.

The foster carers are aware that they have to tell us of any changes within the household and this is set out in the Foster Carers' Agreement. Each house has a Safe Care Policy, which is individual and updated at each new placement." We have now started to do this with family and friend carers". There are clear systems and procedures in place that serves to reduce any potential risk to a child or young person whilst also protecting and safeguarding their well being whilst in the care of the foster carer. Young people spoken to say they feel safe living with their foster parent.

Regular scrutiny is made of information regarding child protection issues in consultation with the child protection unit. A record of all allegations is kept by the service.

Evidence was seen that the service maintains a record of complaints received and of the investigation process and outcome of each complaint. On the whole the information was clear and detailed important matters in relation to the complaint, including visits by the social worker. Placing social workers visits the foster carer's home and will meet and speak with the child alone to assess if there are any concerns the child wants to raise. It was pleasing to note that where concerns have been raised, the matter is broached with the foster carer's as though it is the social worker's concern, to ensure the child/ young person is not placed in a difficult situation.

A discussion with the social workers took place and they said, "We feel the service is good in promoting the protection of children and young people. We take the necessary steps to ensure that the children/young peoples' quality of life is good. We have where necessary taken carers' back to panel and have done some re-assessment of the skills of the carers". Examples were given of two cases where concerns about the carers were highlighted. The issues were considered and as a result additional support was made available. The cases continue to be monitored to make sure the children are safe and their well-being maintained.

Concerns were been raised regarding one young person who accessed a particular internet site on the foster carer's personal computer. The matter of young people accessing inappropriate photography and literature was raised and information was received from the manager who stated, "all foster carers who we have supplied with computers are given a Home Office booklet about the safe use of computers and the internet. They also sign an agreement with the supplier, we have been piloting a Safe-net system to monitor and restrict internet access to inappropriate sites and intend to roll this out imminently. It will be offered to foster carers for use with their own computers as well. There has already been an internal audit of safe computer use to which we have produced an action plan .We are now including computer usage in Safe care policies as these are updated". A copy of the action plan had been reviewed and was considered to address the matters of safe access for young people using the internet.

The Children's Services Directorate has a clear staff recruitment policy. The procedure includes interviews, checks and the required references. Records are kept on personal files and include, the job description and person specification. The person specification for the family placement social workers was seen to have been updated. All people working for the service had an up to date Criminal Records check. Further evidence was seen in relation to the identity of the person and this included, marriage certificates, National Insurance Number etc. Family placement workers are all qualified social workers and registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). On the whole the process of ensuring appropriate vetting of workers and assessment of suitability to this kind of work was evident and clearly recorded.

As part of the inspection process a Panel meeting was observed. The Panel was seen to be clear about its role and function and operates as an inclusive body. The members of the Panel contribute effectively to ensure that only appropriate carers are approved, and that all other matters such as placement updates and complaints were discussed openly and comments noted. A selection of panel minutes was viewed and contained clear information and reasons for decisions being made.

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

7, 13, 31

Salford Fostering Service has developed a training programme recognising that diversity is an area for improvement. Systems were seen to be in place to support young people to attend education and the Care and Education support team assisted this. Partnership and consultation through the services was seen to play an important role in providing services for young people.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers receive training on valuing diversity and anti-discriminatory practice through the preparation groups and rolling programme of training. Discussions with the foster carer's and placement workers also take place during the assessment process and the prospective foster carers views on a range of issues included within the Form F.

The racial and cultural and religious background of the child being considered, along with their emotional needs, is a consideration in determining the most appropriate placement available. Where trans-racial placements cannot be avoided care is taken to ensure that the foster carer is fully aware of the child's needs arising from their racial, cultural and religious background and is equipped and supported to meet them. However, the matching of children and young people in appropriate placements that meet their cultural needs is hindered by the limited range of carer's from different ethnic backgrounds within this service. The employment of permanent recruitment officer would assist in this area.

A discussion took place with the family placement workers around the issues of diversity and placements and they said, "The last diversity training did not work well and carers have said that they feel they need more hands on information in this area. The carers are aware that we may make trans-racial placement and that the health needs of children and any other issues would be fully discussed at the young person's review and decisions made as to the input both the carer and the child may require. This could involve the LAC nurse or other health services".

The Care and Education Support Team provides support to foster carers through the provision of individual tuition and support to children who are beginning to struggle academically. Information and advice and support regarding educational issues are available to foster carers from the Education Co-ordinators for looked after children. The team works to promote importance of educational attainment and the particular difficulties experienced by looked after children.

Carers are made aware of their role in encouraging the child's attendance of education and this is monitored through the competency framework, feedback from schools and the annual review. Foster carers receive specific training in the area of education, and are supported and encouraged to ensure that they support children to school. Occasionally the child / young person may have to change schools and this depends on the area they are living, however consideration is given and takes account of child's needs and wishes and best interest.

Consideration was given to young people who are excluded from school, however this remains a difficult area. A discussion with the family placement workers took place and they said, " When children/young people are excluded from school, it can make the placement problematic especially if the carers work". This can sometimes end up in placement breakdown, so we will try very hard through discussion of the issues with the school in order to maintain the placement. The Educational support team may become involved in assessing the problems at school to assist in planning a way forward that is more appropriate for the child the team went on to say, "we feel however that schools are along way off from taking on board the needs and experiences of 'looked after children' to enable them to learn, so that education can be a positive experience". The service receives up to date information from education of all children being fostered and are able to assess if they are making adequate achievements and are attending regularly, ensuring that the child's educational development is regularly assessed alongside the efforts made by the foster carer.

Copies of personal Education Plans and school reports were seen on the files examined during the inspection.

The young people commented about school and that they are seen as different. They said "because we are in foster care we get bullied at school, we will go to the teacher or the form tutor when this happens." Some of the young people however also commented that they enjoyed their school.

Foster carers are involved in preparing young people to move on to adulthood, and this is viewed as part of their role. There are assisted by the Next Step Project and After Care Service who become involved when the child is aged 15. At this point they will develop a Pathway Plan and support the carer and young people in making plan's to move on in the future, ensuring that the young person is consulted throughout this process.

There is a short-term break scheme in place within the service; this is regularly reviewed through the review procedure or the Salford Families Project Team. It is recognised that the use of short-term breaks does not affect the birth parents responsibility for the child and this is maintained to include health and educational needs.

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

10, 11

The service ensures that children and young people receive adequate contact with families and that this is supported by the foster carer's. Care needs to be taken however, with regards to the present process. The young people accessing this service are clearly consulted and participate in the development of services and information for young people in foster care.

EVIDENCE:

The Children's Services Directorate positively promotes contact between children and young people and their family members. The child's needs must be paramount in planning contact arrangements. There are guidelines about the frequency of contact that it is appropriate to offer during care proceedings to ensure that children's needs for security are not compromised.

There is an expectation upon the foster carers to support and promote family contact. Arrangements are usually made at the time of the placement and the drawing up of the Care Plan, although consideration is also given at the point of matching. Guidance and training is offered to the carers regarding appropriate levels of contact, how to support this and record keeping after each event. Social workers receive training on this topic, in order to achieve the best results from contact for the child whilst maintaining their safety and well-being.

However, issues were raised regarding transport problems and managing carers who find it difficult to make relationships with the parents. A discussion with the placing social workers took place and they said, "occasionally a child may be placed with a foster carer who is already committed to supporting contact for one or two other children. This additional expectation can prove

difficult and put a strain on the placement". A discussion with a carer took place and they said, "I hear of problems when I meet with other carer's, they feel bad for the child and want to protect them and sometimes that means they have difficulty in building a relationship with the parents, I can understand this but you have to move away from this to help the child, I have been lucky with the families I have helped".

The service must address this matter and assess the contact requirements of all children when looking at placing a child where the carer is approved for more than one. A risk assessment in relation to this matter would assist in determining where contact arrangements could prove difficult for the carer.

A selection of files were assessed as part of the inspection and evidence was seen that contact arrangements and information on contact restrictions was clearly recorded and were detailed on young person's file, ensuring a consistent approach to contact whilst assisting to maintain the child's safety and well-being.

Evidence suggested that the staff had been consulted and involved in the development of the Children's Guide. The Guide was piloted with a group of children who gave input in creating the document and the consultation process extended to gaining feedback from the young people and carers. Although few questionnaires were received back from foster children, evidence was seen that on the whole they had received the Children's Guide and this had been explained to them.

Young people receive a regular newsletter from the Listening to Children Officer. A copy of the young peoples' newsletter was seen and offered young people a range of interesting topics to read. A number of children attend the VOICE Group and make an active contribution to a range of relevant issues. Feedback from young people about the information that is helpful to them about being in foster care has been used to inform the Children's Guide. Young people attending the VOICE Group have undertaken work on Anti- Bullying, and the five outcomes and are involved with the Children and Young Person's Partnership Board.

The young people spoken to during the inspection said that the group met every two weeks and that "we talk about bullying, children's rights, drugs etc. It was clear that the young people valued the group with one child commented that "coming to the group I can make friends as you share things in common with the others".

It is clear that the service acknowledges the importance of child consultation and has worked hard to develop a variety of ways in which children and young people can have their say and make their views and opinions known. It is pleasing that the young people play an important role in the development of

services for young people in foster care and that their experiences are valued by the service. The service should be commended for their work in this area.

Information received from the Principle Manager indicated that the review team are to undertake a pilot project for young people to chair their own statutory reviews. Children/young peoples' views are also sought with regards to their placements and they receive a feedback form to complete on their own or with the help of the placement worker, which forms part of the foster carers annual review.

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

14, 29

The service has developed a 'Next Step Project, complemented by the After Care Service and training of foster carer's to ensure young people have a smooth transition into adulthood. Foster carer's receive payments for providing care for young people, though this ceases once the child is 18 and not in full-time education.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers are involved in preparing young people to move on to adulthood, and this is viewed as part of their role. They are assisted by the Next Step project and After care Service who become involved when the child is aged 15. At this point they will develop a pathway plan and support the carer and young people in making plan's to move on in the future, ensuring that the young person is consulted throughout this process. Foster carers receive training on the matters of supporting young people through the skills required to live indecently and Specific competences about preparing children for independence are included in the competence framework.

Financial support is given to foster carers who continue to care for children post 18 and in full-time education in the form of a Continuing Care Allowance. Young people aged 18 without a further educational placement were to access finances from the social security path.

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

1,2,4,5,16,17, 19, 20,21, 22,24,25,26

The fostering service is effectively managed; with clear lines of accountability with a team of family placement staff who are trained and who receive the level of supervision and developmental support they require to ensure positive outcomes for the children and young people placed.

EVIDENCE:

The service was being managed by a manager with a number of years experience of family placement, with a group of experienced staff who demonstrated clarity of the work and of their role as family placement workers. The family placement workers reported that they received relevant training and support that they require to carry out their tasks. This includes regular and effective supervision. One worker commented that supervision was of "the highest standard" and that this was helped by the fact that they "worked as a team". Annual appraisal also takes place.

All family placement workers are qualified social workers. They reported that they were able to keep up to date with current practice, legislation etc by identifying appropriate training such as the Adoption and Children Act. The staff said "we attend two-developmental day events each year where we discuss what training is needed as individual but also as a team".

The number of staff had improved since the last inspection and it was pleasing to note that the service had appointed family and friend social workers with responsibility for the family and friend carers. However, as previously noted there was a need for the agency to appoint a permanent recruitment officer with responsibility for the recruitment of foster carer. This would also assist in focusing attention on recruiting carers from within Black and minority ethnic communities, which would serve to enhance the service and the outcome for children/young people from minority background, as at present this is a shortfall in the service

The service had a Statement of Purpose that was known to the staff. Staff members confirmed that they had had the opportunity of being involved in the development of the document. The Statement of Purpose outlines the service aims and objectives and there was evidence to indicate that the service was operating within its Statement of Purpose. In addition to this document a Children's Guide was available

The service had in place established fostering policies and procedures and these were seen to support the Statement of Purpose and that the service was being managed in line with the stated policies and procedures.

The manager had developed effective systems for monitoring the service and copy of the recent monitoring document was made available for the inspection. The report detailed the progress of the service. As well as the monitoring report there was also a business plan and it was encouraging to note that the staff were aware of the existence of this document and could say what objectives had been met and the areas requiring further development and expansion.

A good working relationship had been developed with the social work team although the social workers expressed the view that although they were involved in the foster carers review they would appreciate feedback from the foster carers about the support they offered to the children so that they are able to address any concerns. It may be that the manager could have further discussions with the social work team on this matter.

As stated earlier in this report, the service had extended and developed the training offered to foster carers with the implementation of the skills for payment programme. This has led to an increase in the number of carers taking up training.

Foster carers were supported and provided with the Foster Care Agreement which sets out the service's responsibility to the carer as well as what was expected of the carer. Records were held on the foster carers' files of the support visits and of any concerns raised by carers and the action taken by the service to address the concerns.

As noted on previous inspections the fostering service is assisted by an efficient administrative system. Prior to the start of the inspection concerns were expressed about the system used to record the data on foster carers and children/young people placed. At the start of the inspection the issues had been addressed and work was ongoing during the inspection on improving the system.

Foster carers and children/young people's files were maintained to a high standard, this made case tracking easy. It was pleasing to be able to track the child's history, which included copies of core assessments, medical reports, education plans, record of social worker's visits to the child and copies of relevant reports and reviews with the recommendations of the review.

The current office space is cramped and limited and staff commented that this is the only problem with the service. All staff spoken to during the inspection acknowledge that the premises are not ideal. The service must review the office accommodation to ensure the health and safety of staff protected and to ensure that the premises are fit for purpose.

Overall this was a good service where the outcomes for children/young people were seen to be positive.

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	4

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

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	4

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

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	4
4	3
5	3
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	3
20	4
21	3
22	3
23	X
24	4
25	4
26	2
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
2	FS26	23	The service must review the safety and adequacy of the current office premises to ensure that the offices are fit for its purpose.	30/05/06

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 service must keep under review the work undertaken by the family and friends support workers.
2	FS7	The service should take appropriate action to appoint recruitment officer.
3	FS6	The service should review the arrangements for the allocation of equipment to ensure that equipment made available to foster carers is of a good standard of safety and in good working order.

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