



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering

**Cambridgeshire County Council
Fostering and Adoption Service
The Buttsgrove Centre
38 Buttsgrove Way
Huntingdon, Cambs
PE29 1LY**

Lead Inspector
Jacqui Barry

Key Announced Inspection
23rd January 2007 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
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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	Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering
Address	Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering and Adoption Service The Buttsgrove Centre 38 Buttsgrove Way Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 1LY
Telephone number	01480 376413
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Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Jackie Coventry
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 20th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Cambridge County Council Fostering Service assesses, approves and provides on-going support to foster carers. The service's primary aim is to provide an adequate supply of quality family placements for children who are looked after by the local authority.

The Cambridgeshire County Council Link Service is a separately line managed service providing short-term/respite family placements for disabled children who are not the child's primary carer. This service has a separate system for the approval and support of carers and a separate specialist team.

SUMMARY

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

The main inspection activity took place between 23rd and 26th January 2007 by two Regulation Inspectors. Additional inspection work happened the week before the inspection. Information for the inspection was gathered by:

- Observing the mainstream and link fostering panels
- Observing one carer's support group meeting
- Individual and group discussions with children and young people, carers and fostering staff
- Discussions with service and senior managers connected to fostering
- Discussions with other professionals connected to fostering
- Reviewing children's, young people's, carer's and staff files
- Evaluating questionnaires (issued by the Commission for Social Care Inspection) to children and young people, carers and social work staff

What the service does well:

Some good efforts had been made to meet the needs of children and young people from black and ethnic minority groups. The service had recruited many new members of staff to support carers. Training available to carers had been given a priority and there was an obvious, new drive to support carers in different ways, through groups and the mentoring scheme, as well as through supervision.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service had improved in the following areas:

- training available to carers
- support provided in relation to children and young people's education
- providing evidence that gaps in carers employment have been explored
- the recording of complaints
- carers recording the outcome of contact

What they could do better:

The service must improve on the following areas:

- photographs held on staff personnel files
- evidence that criminal convictions have been explored during carer's assessments

The service should improve on the following areas:

- details contained in Foster Placement Agreements
- working with children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups
- consultation with children and young people
- making carers aware of support groups accessible to carers
- more regular discussions with carers about safe caring issues
- informing the CSCI of allegations against carers

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

The overall quality in this outcome area was good. Carers were meeting the health needs of children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

Of the 18 children and young people who completed the CSCI questionnaire, 12 reported that they always received support and advice about being healthy and 3 said that they usually did.

Evidence in children and young people's case files indicated that they were registered with a GP and attended health appointments. Carers were provided with available medical background information.

The psychologist linked to the service provided support and advice to carers, attended carer's training and support meetings. 84% of cases referred to the psychologists were seen within 2 to 4 weeks.

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

The overall quality in this outcome area was good. Appropriate safeguards were in place to ensure that children and young people were protected.

EVIDENCE:

Fostering staff personnel files were examined following the main inspection activity. Files were largely in order, although none included a recent photograph as required under regulation.

Carer's homes that were visited as part of the inspection provided comfortable accommodation to children and young people. Health and safety and pet assessments were present on carer's files.

One child within the link service did not have his own bed, but instead used that of the carer's own son, who slept on a sofa bed when the 'link-child' was in placement. This arrangement was not ideal, although did not present any concerns for the child, parent, carer or son. In addition, the circumstances had been in place and appeared to 'work', for several years.

In one of the cases tracked, both carers had positive traces on their Criminal Records Bureau check. References were made to some convictions within the Form F assessment, although the specific details of the offences and the

carer's responses to these were not clearly recorded. Further, the fostering panel minutes did not address this at all.

It was particularly positive that all of the children and young people who completed the CSCI questionnaire reported without exception that they "always" felt they were well cared for by their carers within their current placements.

In two of the four cases 'tracked' as part of the inspection, placements did not match the children and young people's ethnicity. Further, Foster Placement Agreements (FPA) did not identify what additional help carers required to support or compensate for any gaps in matching.

At the last inspection, a Statutory Requirement was made regarding the level of detail contained in FPA. The format of FPA had not changed and although the document was largely satisfactory, crucially, it did not contain specific reference to elements of matching. Further, this document was not available at the beginning of placements.

At the last inspection, a Statutory Requirement was made in relation to child protection training for carers. One carer seen had not had training on child protection, although had a clear understanding of how to respond to concerns. The fostering trainer reported that the service was developing to provide child protection training to carers before children and young people were placed.

Safe caring policies were in evidence on all files inspected and documents had been signed as previously recommended. There was an overall sense from carers that they were aware of safe caring practices. However, there were further opportunities to be made of more regular discussions about safe caring and child protection issues through carer supervision and support groups.

At the last inspection, a Statutory Requirement was made regarding the level of information held on staff personnel files. Several staff files were randomly selected by the inspection team and revealed that all of the necessary checks had been undertaken before staff began working for the service.

The mainstream fostering panel met monthly or bi-monthly. The panel advisor was unchanged since the last inspection and this provided invaluable continuity in what had been a year of changing panel members.

The panel chair felt confident that the current panel members, although some new and not all with in-depth fostering knowledge would develop into a fully cohesive and established panel. It was positive to note that feedback forms issued to carers following panel featured on the agenda for discussion and further action where appropriate.

The existing panel advisor was a key link between the panel and the fostering service, with clear and strategic input into the quality assurance function. The views of children and young people were not always explicitly recorded in reports presented to the panel and one carer reported a delay in being contacted following panel's decision following her review.

The inspection team had a concern about the level of training provided to new panel members. The panel chair acknowledged this and some preliminary guidance sessions had been provided. The County Manager confirmed that the service would carry out its duties in relation to panel member training.

It was particularly pleasing to note that Form F assessments presented before the panel were thorough and well written. One set of panel papers read during the inspection were returned to the fostering service due to a lack of detail, which highlighted that panel was fulfilling its quality monitoring function.

The link panel functioned separately of the mainstream panel. The link panel was appropriately represented with independent members including professionals from health and education. Although carers did not routinely attend reviews, a new carer was present during the panel observed as part of the inspection and made a valuable contribution.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13 & 31

The overall quality in this outcome area was good. Good efforts had been made to support children and young people's cultural backgrounds. However, the service needed to make explicit expectations about meeting the needs of children and young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

EVIDENCE:

Two of the four children and young people whose cases were 'tracked' were from black or minority ethnic backgrounds. Written information was available in relation to children and young people's cultural needs, but there service should consider how it could improve the quality information recorded, specifically how carers meet specific cultural needs.

There was written evidence to support that carer's were meeting children and young people's cultural needs, although none shared the same ethnicity of those placed. One carer provided excellent examples of the way they had worked with a child to help her develop a positive sense of identity. In addition to promoting self-esteem, the carer had purchased children's books with images of people from different ethnic backgrounds.

At the last inspection, a Statutory Requirement was made in respect of training on working with children from minority ethnic groups. There had been a take-up of 7 carers, out of a possible 12 on one a course run to raise awareness about caring for children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups. Fostering social workers acknowledged that the arrangements for carers and other professionals to communicate with children and young people

in placement, whose first language was not English, was fraught with difficulties.

Overall, there had been some good practice in relation to carers meeting children's cultural needs. The inspection team concluded however that this was as a result of the particular skills of those carers and fostering social workers. The lack of specific guidance and policy about expectations on carers and staff was reliant on individuals, rather than building on the experience of individuals. It is therefore recommended that the service develop a policy around the expectations on fostering social workers when working with carers who have children and young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds placed with them.

At the last inspection, a Statutory Requirement was made regarding training for carers to support children and young people's education. Training was available providing an 'Introduction to Education' and workshops also ran on literacy and numeracy. The link carer visited described spending a morning per term in the classroom with the child she provided respite to, to ensure she was 'up-to-date' with his education. Another young child 'case-tracked' attended a nursery twice a week.

At the last inspection, a Statutory Requirement was made for the service to evidence how it was supporting children and young people in respect of education, training and employment. The children and young people visited as part of the inspection were all appropriately supported in their education and there were no specific concerns raised from any carer or member of the service to indicate that this was a problem area.

Of the 18 children and young people who completed the CSCI questionnaire, 15 reported that they "always" received the right help to be successful in their education. The link service provided complex packages of care for children and young people with disabilities. Pre-placement matching was good and communication between all involved parties was regular and ongoing. Parents remained the main carers and welcomed the support offered by the link service.

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

The overall quality in this outcome area was good. Children and young people were supported to maintain contact with their families. Consultation arrangements with children and young people could be further developed.

EVIDENCE:

All of the carers spoken with had a clear understanding of the contact arrangements for the children and young people placed with them. There had been an appropriate response to kinship carers who had not felt able to manage contact and the arrangements were changed as a result of their wishes.

At the last inspection, a Statutory Requirement was made for carers to record the outcome of contact. In two of the cases tracked, contact was managed or supervised by a professional worker not connected to the fostering team. One carer visited also kept comprehensive records detailing the outcome of contact and these details were passed onto the child's social worker.

Consultation was happening with carers, children and young people. Individual workers listened to children and carers through supervision and support groups. The Just Us consultation group had been used to help develop aspects of the service and the County Manager met with the Children's Participation Officer on a quarterly basis to discuss further work.

To further develop this area, the service may wish to consider others ways of consulting more specifically with children and young people in foster care. The service could also positively identify its own areas for development and

improvement about which it would like the input of children and young people in foster care.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

EVIDENCE:

These standards were not inspected.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 & 32

The overall quality in this outcome area was good. The service was well staffed and organised to fulfil its responsibilities in relation to children and young people placed in Cambridgeshire.

EVIDENCE:

Over the preceding 12 months, the service had undergone significant changes. The staffing compliment had doubled in size with a total of 29 new staff having been recruited. The relatively newly established specialist teams had created a well organised service, with fostering social workers being able to develop their skills in a clear and focussed fashion.

After a period of fairly aggressive staff recruitment, with a few vacant posts left to fill, Team Managers were keen to allow a period of consolidation for fostering social work staff with the focus on ensuring consistency of practice. Further areas for development were that of recruiting more carers to offer specific, specialist placements such as parent and baby and rehabilitation support.

The combined number of newly approved carers from April 2006 and ongoing assessments up to March 2007 was 36, from across the county. There continued to be enormous demand on the service to accommodate children and young people and the County Manager had a clear vision, using some creative methods, to recruit further carers to meet the demands placed on the service.

Three of the four children and young people 'case-tracked' for the inspection were placed with relatively new carers whom had been assessed and approved within the last 18 months. Form F Assessments examined for the panel were of good quality and gaps in employment had been covered as required from the last inspection.

At the last inspection, a good practice recommendation was made for carers to keep records of significant events concerning the children and young people they were supporting. There had been a marked improvement in the level of important detail carers had been recording since the last inspection, although it was not clear whether there continued to be problems with some longer-standing carers keeping records.

The service had a clear and developing strategy for working with and supporting carers. Foster carer's support meetings were relatively newly established, with the Cambridge based group having met on one previous occasion.

During the support meeting attended by a member of the inspection team, two relatively new carers commented that they had gained a great deal from the initial group and were keen to develop a support network, which included experienced carers. Another set of carers seen during the inspection felt they could benefit from getting to know other carers and were not aware of support groups. The other carers seen felt very supported and had had positive experiences.

The fostering service was appropriately represented by a team manager, who was able to pick-up on specific issues and take them back to the team and address where necessary. It was positive to note that additional support was to be offered to carers in the form of a mentoring scheme, although one set of carers visited had only spoken with their allocated mentor once.

There were clear expectations about the range of discussion areas to be covered by fostering social workers during carer's supervision, including training. In one instance, training had not featured as part of carer's supervision until the week before the inspection and when it did, the carer signed up to 7 or 8 courses, so was clearly keen to develop. This is a repeat recommendation.

All carers reported receiving good support from the service and knew who to contact in the event of an emergency, or out of hours. There were positive examples of joint working between fostering social workers and children's social workers in more complex cases and carers were clear about the different roles of each.

At the last inspection, a Statutory Requirement was made in respect of training to carers covering specifically, child protection, supporting children's education, listening to children, working with children from minority ethnic groups and first aid. A considerable amount of work had gone into the developing the training available and carers spoken with stated that they benefited from training.

It was particularly positive that carer's children had been involved in the 'Skills to Foster' course. There was a flexible approach to offering training to carers at suitable times of the day and to help them overcome other child-care responsibilities. One carer seen had facilitated training courses and very much enjoyed this area of work and continued learning.

Children and young people's case records held by the fostering service were satisfactory. Expectations about the level of information held on files for the link scheme were less, given that families remained the main carers with parental responsibility. The service should clarify what documentation is completed for children and young people with disabilities receiving a service from the link scheme.

At the last inspection, a Statutory requirement was made in respect of records of complaints. Three complaints had been made to the service in the last 12 months, which is a very small number for such a large service covering a very wide geographical area. On this occasion there was evidence to support that records had been kept of all complaints made, with the outcome clearly recorded.

At the last inspection, a good practice recommendation was made for the service to inform the CSCI of all allegations against carers. There had been several allegations against carers within the last 12 months, which had been appropriately investigated, although not reported to the CSCI. This is a repeat recommendation.

The kinship team had been set up since the last inspection and one of the cases tracked was that of a child placed with relatives. Fostering social workers were sensitive to existing relationships and regular support and supervision was being provided and training was made available and encouraged.

The County Manager was responsible for the overall management of the fostering service and had been in post for 12 months. The link service continued to be separately managed, although this was due to become another team under the management of the County Manager in March 2007.

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	2
6	3
8	3
9	2
15	2
30	3

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

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

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

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

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	FS3 FS15	20	The Registered Provider must ensure that personnel records include all of the information detailed under Schedule 1, FSR 2002. Inspected, not met, brought forward to the next inspection.	30/06/07
2	FS6	27, Schedule 3	Foster carer assessments must include the details of any criminal convictions.	26/01/07

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	FS1	It is recommended that the Statement of Purpose detail the numbers and outcome of complaints made to the service. Not inspected, brought forward to the next inspection.
2	FS7	It is recommended that the service consider how it can improve the quality of information recorded about children and young people's ethnic backgrounds and how their specific needs will be met within their placements.

3	FS7	It is recommended that the service develops a policy setting out expectations on fostering social workers when supporting carers who have children and young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds placed with them.
4	FS8	It is recommended that Foster Placement Agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching and identify additional help to carers to support or compensate for any gaps in matching.
5	FS8	It is recommended that the service audit the suitability of the existing FPA document to meet all of the elements required under regulation and audit the timing FPA are formulated in relation to placements being made.
6	FS9	It is recommended that further opportunities be created to hold discussions with carers about safe caring practices, at appropriate intervals.
7	FS11	It is recommended that the fostering service consider other ways of consulting children and young people in order to develop practice and ways of working.
8	FS11	It is recommended that the service develop a plan identifying areas for improvement within the service and consults children and young people about proposed changes.
9	FS21	It is recommended that the service ensure all carers are aware of support groups available to them.
10	FS22	It is recommended that foster carer's supervision covers the topics highlighted in the fostering service's new guidance on carer supervision. Inspected, not met, brought forward to the next inspection.
11	FS23	It is recommended the service inform carers of all training events and that discussions about training happen regularly during carer's supervision.
12	FS24	It is recommended that there are clear expectations about the level of information required to be on files for children and young people using the link scheme.
13	FS25	It is recommended that the fostering service notify the CSCI of all allegations made against carers. Inspected, not met, brought forward to the next inspection.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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