



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Richmond Fostering Services

**London Borough of Richmond
42 York Street
Twickenham
Middlesex
TW1 3BW**

Lead Inspector
Gavin Thomas

Announced Inspection
19th, 20th, 21st & 23rd February 2007 11:00

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	Richmond Fostering Services
Address	London Borough of Richmond 42 York Street Twickenham Middlesex TW1 3BW
Telephone number	020 8891 7754
Fax number	020 8891 7682
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Lisa Sepahi
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 20th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

The London Borough of Richmond Fostering Service is a local authority service that provides temporary and permanent foster carers for children and young people.

The service is based in Twickenham, close to other local authority services.

The Fostering Manager was appointed in January 2006 and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the service.

The types of service offered are: (a) Short Term Foster Care, (b) Permanent Foster Care, (c) Short Break Service and (d) Kinship Care.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection took place over a period of 4 days. The following formed the basis of this inspection:

- Pre-inspection meeting with the management team.
- Discussions and meetings with key professionals, management and the Social Work Team.
- A meeting with the team responsible for managing the short breaks (respite) service.
- Inspection of various records and documents including a range of pre – inspection records.
- Visits to foster homes.
- Feedback meeting with the management team.

Questionnaires were distributed to children/young people, Foster Carers & Children’s Social Workers. Responses were as follows:

Children/young people – 3 completed questionnaires were received.

Very positive comments were made about the quality of care received in foster placements.

Foster Carers – 12 completed questionnaires were received.

Very positive comments were made about the quality of the service provided by the fostering team including direct support, supervision and training.

Social Workers – 6 completed questionnaires were received.

Matters regarding work relations between different teams were addressed with the management team the time of the inspection.

The Inspector takes this opportunity in thanking every one contributed towards this inspection.

What the service does well:

The London Borough of Richmond Fostering Service is committed to providing a high quality service for Foster Carers and children/young people. Equally, staff are empowered and supported to develop their skills and potential.

The service is lead by a team of well-qualified and experienced managers, whose agenda is to keep the service under review and implement strategies to develop and improve current practice. Evidence was available to support this agenda.

At the previous inspection, six of the standards assessed were rated a score of “4”, which signified that the service had exceeded those National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The service continues to do exceedingly well in these and other areas.

What has improved since the last inspection?

A summary of improvements/developments over the last twelve months is as follows:

- A two-part course provided for Foster Carers on physical and non-physical health matters.
- A new recruitment strategy was launched.
- The Fostering Panel received training on “kinship care” and “competency based assessments”.
- A Foster Carer buddy Service has been established.
- The “reading mentor” Service is proving to be successful.
- Educational surgeries are held fortnightly.
- More robust procedures have/are being introduced regarding fostering allowances to meet new government regulations.
- The Fostering Team was reorganised.
- A new bonus Service was introduced in November 2006 whereby a Foster Carer could receive £500.00 if they refer a friend who is approved as a Foster Carer.
- The assessment of friends and family as carers has been revised.
- Foster carers have been consulted on a range of training initiatives.

What they could do better:

Overall, the service was doing exceptionally well in meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services assessed and the Fostering Regulations 2002.

The service is required however, to ensure that positive proof of identity including a recent photograph is available on Foster Carers files.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service actively works to obtain the resources required to promote and secure best health outcomes for children/young people and supports Foster Carers in securing the best standard of health care for children/young people. The service has successfully built partnerships with other key agencies and professionals to further develop health care planning for children placed by the service.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service works closely with the multi-agency team, CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service), Leaving Care Team, Children's Social Work team and other professionals to ensure the best health outcomes for children/young people. Key professionals within the multi-agency team include:

- CLA (Children Looked After) Nurse.
- Clinical Psychologist.
- Systemic Therapist.
- Education Psychologist.

The CLA Nurse liaises with health visitors, Foster Carers and School Nurses with regard to promoting healthy life styles with children/young people.

A gender group has been established for young females in foster care. This Service was still being piloted at the time of this inspection. Outreach services

such as sexual health are provided. Young people are advised of how to access these types of services within the borough.

One young person informed the Inspector that they have access to health education/resources and appointments with the CLA Nurse.

Foster Carers and one young person said that the CLA Nurse is very supportive and health provisions are satisfactory.

Primary health care treatments are arranged by Foster Carers. These include GP, Dentist and Optician.

One young person's file examined was well maintained with regard to health. It was also noted that Supervising Social Workers record any matters regarding children/young people's health during supervision meetings with Foster Carers.

The Fostering Service has set out clear points of action with regard to "Being Healthy". This is in keeping with the London Borough of Richmond Specialist Children's Service plan.

A monthly group called "Think Space" is provided for young people and care leavers. This group covers topics such as behavioural matters and social integration. Foster Carers may also access this group. Foster Carers are also supported and encouraged to work with children/young people on matters such as self-esteem, managing and coping with difficulties and promoting healthy lifestyles. One young person confirmed that they are fully supported by their Foster Carers with regard to health related matters.

A good range of training opportunities is provided for Foster Carers. Most recent training included physical and emotional health. Foster Carers are also required to attend mandatory health and safety training including First Aid and CPR.

All Foster Carers are required to undergo annual health checks to ensure their on going fitness to provide safe and nurturing environments for children/young people.

Good management systems were in place for monitoring ways in which Foster Carers support children/young with regard to health matters.

The fostering Manager reported that one of the aims of the service over the next year is to develop a consistent approach for the way in which children/young people's health care appointments are recorded.

Further training will also be explored with an emphasis on emotional health and well-being of children aged 0-5 years.

A course on “emotional literacy” is scheduled for September 2007 for staff and Foster Carers. Part two of this course will focus on Play Therapy.

The introduction of competency-based reviews will enhance the monitoring of Foster Carers abilities to promote healthy lifestyles. Health and safety annual assessment forms will also be revised to ensure that specific matters relating to the needs of a child are taken into account.

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.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 & 30

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

All children/young people are placed with Foster Carers who have been thoroughly assessed.

All possible steps are taken, based on listening to what children/young people say, to ensure that they are not made to feel different because they are fostered.

The service is extremely responsive to feedback and can demonstrate resulting improvements.

The Fostering Panel is well-managed with effective membership, which is representative of the local community. It receives and acts upon high quality information, ensuring an overview of the range of Foster Carers and placements made.

Managers, staff and Foster Carers are demonstrably safe and suitable to work with children/young people.

EVIDENCE:

The Principal Service Manager and the Fostering Manager are both very experienced and suitably qualified to manage this service. The Fostering Manager has been in post for one year. During this time, she has gained the confidence of the staff team and Foster Carers. The Fostering Manager has also been effective in implementing a "change" programme to build upon systems already in place.

Staff and Foster Carers visited; also spoke very positively about the support and management support they receive from the Principal Service Manager.

All recruitment checks for staff are processed and retained by the London Borough of Richmond Human Resources Department. Recruitment checks were inspected at previous inspections. The Fostering Manager reported that there have been no changes to the way in which these checks are obtained and verified. These checks were not examined on this occasion.

The Recruitment and Assessment Officer is responsible for processing all initial enquiries. This includes an initial visit to applicants (prospective Foster Carers) homes. Guidance for staff is provided in the Supervising Social Workers Handbook. Foster families are also required a health and safety assessment known as the "family policy". This is judged to be good practice.

Records examined confirmed that Foster Carers are issued with Carbon Monoxide alarms. Foster Carers are required to sign for these alarms. This is judged to be good practice but it was suggested that these forms are also dated when the alarms are issued.

Health and safety risk assessments carried out are thorough and include a pet checklist and dog checklist.

Statistics are kept of all initial enquiries received from members of the public who are interested in fostering.

Two foster homes were visited as part of this inspection. One foster home was well established and one home was recently approved for a kinship placement. Both foster homes were very well kept and judged to be suitable for the children/young people in placement at the time of the visits. One foster carer confirmed that the Supervising Social Worker is very thorough during their visits and will address any matters identified or raised with regard to the environment. Records examined also confirmed this.

The Fostering Service had very thorough processes in place for matching children/young people to Foster Carers who have the skills and provisions for meeting their assessed needs. The Fostering Manager reported that the

percentage of placement disruptions/breakdowns is very low. The Foster Carer recruitment strategy clearly sets out specific targets to recruit Foster Carers to increase choice and improve on current matching processes in place. The Recruitment and Assessment Officer gave examples of the types of Foster Carers the Fostering Service hopes to recruit this year.

A group is available to children/young people in transracial and transcultural placements. In addition, support for children/young people in these placements includes an Individual Equalities Plan.

The Fostering Service works closely with the Principal Manager for Safeguarding. Joint work is undertaken to provide training and support for Foster Carers and staff on child protection and safe caring procedures. Training is also provided by Independent Trainers. The Principal Manager for Safeguarding explained the Training Sub Group is responsible for reviewing and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of training on child protection and safe caring. The "Skills to Foster" training includes training on child protection. Supporting information is also obtained in the Foster Carers Handbook.

A Case Discussion Forum meets every three to four months. This forum is made up of representatives from the safeguarding board, education, health and the legal department. A forum for staff and other stakeholders is held every six weeks. All action points from these forums are recorded and acted upon. The provision of this forum is highly commended. In particular for placements or cases which present difficulties and are complex.

The Principal Manager for Safeguarding was of the opinion that Fostering Team was very clear of their roles and does well with regard to promoting the safe caring of children/young people.

All children/young people are encouraged and supported to contact a named person if they are unhappy or concerned about any aspect of their care.

The types of support offered by Supervising Social Workers to Foster Carers and children/young people regarding safety matters are highly commended. The effectiveness of this support was evident from records examined and discussions with Foster Carers.

Policies and procedures were in place for when a child/young person is missing from a foster home. The Fostering Manager reported that this has not been a significant matter since the last inspection.

There were no vacancies within the Fostering Team at the time of this inspection. The Fostering manager reported that the team has been stable for at least two years. Three new posts were created within the team over the last year. The Fostering Manager confirmed that all Social Workers within the

Fostering Team are suitably qualified. The Fostering Manager also confirmed that all Social Workers are registered with the General Social Care Council.

Records examined confirmed that references and other checks are carried out on Foster Carers. Relevant checks are updated annually and CRB (Criminal Record Bureau) checks are updated every three years. The renewal of CRB checks also applies to all staff. It was noted that although thorough checks are carried on Foster Carers, positive proof of identity including a recent photograph was not available on Foster Carer files examined. This is required under Schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations 2002.

The Fostering Panel was not observed on this occasion. Records and information relating to the panel were very clearly set out. This included policies and procedures relating to the Fostering panel, membership details and requirements and training. Minutes of recent Fostering Panels examined were very informative and professionally presented. The minutes indicated that all cases presented to the panel are thoroughly examined.

Current panel membership meets the criteria as set out in the Fostering Regulations 2002 and in accordance with BAAF (British Association for Adoption & Fostering) guidelines. This includes medical representation, independent members from education and health, independent Foster Carers and a young person formally living in foster care.

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.

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

7, 13 & 31

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Service policies and procedures value diversity and equality and the contribution that such an approach makes to the care for children/young people.

Innovative and creative approaches to education, which addresses the individual child/young person's needs, are actively promoted. The Fostering Service ensures that all children/young people are supported to do well and to reach their full potential.

The Short Break Service is well managed, resourceful and demonstrates that a quality and efficient service is provided.

EVIDENCE:

An equalities plan was in place. The Fostering Manager confirmed that this plan was linked to the London Borough of Richmond's corporate plan.

Foster Carers and one young person visited were of the opinion that the Fostering Service does well with regard to equality and diversity matters and issues.

Foster carers are required to attend training on equality and diversity. A good range of resources/books is available to Foster Carers with regard to culture and supporting children/young people from diverse backgrounds.

The multi-agency team has overall responsibility for supporting children/young people and Foster Carers with regard to educational attainment. The support from this team is proving to be successful and this was evident from the high percentage of GCSE exam results over the last year and ETE (Education, Training & Employment) participation of young people aged 16 plus.

One young person spoke very positively about the support they receive from their Foster Carers with regard to their education. One household visited, indicated that the Foster Carers provide suitable play and educational toys and books for the child/young person. Foster Carers are required to attend PEP (Personal Education Planning) meetings and other school events such as open days as much as possible.

Joint events are hosted by the Fostering Team and the Children Looked After team. These events include:

- Fostering Fun Day.
- Celebration of Achievement Day.
- Celebration of Festivals such as Christmas.

The Culture for Keeps project engages children/young people in a variety of sporting and other community events and activities. One young person confirmed that they enjoy meeting up with other young people at these events and taking part in the activities.

Training on supporting children/young people in education was held for Foster Carers in January 2007. Foster Carers also have the option of attending an education surgery. These surgeries are held weekly. The CLA (Children Looked After) Teacher confirmed that the interest and attendance for these surgeries have increased.

A Reading Mentor Service is now established. At the time of this inspection, nine mentors were approved and assisting children/young people with their reading. Positive comments were reported regarding children/young people's progress with the assistance of their mentors.

Children/young people's education and learning needs are discussed at statutory reviews and supervision meetings with Foster Carers. The Fostering Manager explained that over the next twelve months, Foster Carers would be encouraged to be more active in ensuring that action points identified in PEP's are acted upon in a more timely way. The Fostering Manager was also of the opinion that Foster Carers would benefit from attending further training and workshop events.

A separate team is responsible for the short break (respite) service for children/young people with disabilities. The team is base at the Croft Centre in Kew. The team consists of the following:

- Service Manager.
- Team Manager.
- Social Work Outreach Manager.
- Two Social Workers (part time).
- One Social Worker (full time – Befriender Service).
- Administrative Support.

At the time of this inspection, twenty-five households were approved for providing Short Break Services, out of which twenty-one were providing placements for thirty-two children/young people.

For the benefit of the reader, a short break carer is also known as a Family Link Carer.

The Inspector met with two of the management team and one Social Worker. A range of information was also provided for pre-inspection purposes to evidence how the Short Break Service is managed and delivered. Most of the procedures and systems were very similar and consistent to that of the main Fostering Service.

The quality of records examined for the Service was of a very high standard. A newsletter is published for the benefit of parents and short term Foster Carers. This newsletter was judged to be very informative and included details of events which young people take part in. This newsletter is highly commended for its content and is judged to be a good method of keeping parents and carers informed of key matters and a way of celebrating children/young people's success and achievements.

The Panel for short breaks is separate to the Panel for mainstream fostering and kinship carers. The Manager confirmed that checks are carried out on all panel members are required under the Fostering Regulations 2002. Training is also provided for the panel. Currently, panel meetings are held every other month. This panel was not observed on this inspection. However, the Inspector did propose that this would be highly recommended for the next statutory inspection. Equally, a different range of records would be sampled and more time would be spent tracking the processes in place through discussions with staff and short break carers.

There are networking opportunities between the Short Break Service, main Fostering Service and other stakeholders within the Local Authority such as health, education and the safeguarding board. Where possible, joint training is arranged and social events are shared.

All prospective short break carers are subject to a thorough assessment and presented to the panel for recommendation of approval. Regular supervision meetings are also carried with short break carers.

Some of the records examined for the Short Breaks Service were as follows:

- Survey for prospective short break carers to complete prior to approval.
- Pack for applicants about the panel.
- Information pack for short break panel members.
- Criteria for competency-based assessments.
- Information guide for parents.
- Information guide for short break carers.
- Health and safety – Supporting Guidance for health and safety. This document provides vital information and is highly commended.

Quality Management Systems were in place. The Short Breaks Panel also carries out quality assurance audits. The Manager of the service was of the opinion that over the last twelve months, the service has raised its profile and done well in two areas as follows:

- Training – this has been achieved by providing training on complex matters such as invasive treatments and gastrostomy feeds.
- Assessments – The quality of assessments has improved. Social workers have also been trained to carry out competency-based assessments.

The Manager explained that one of the aims of the service over the next twelve months is to review the Family Link handbook.

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.

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

10 & 11

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Maintaining and developing family contact and friendships are integral to the service provided. This is emphasised through the training and support given to Foster Carers.

Children/young people's views are sought with regard to contact with their family and friends.

The service has established an effective representation system for children/young people to feed in views and comments.

Children/young people's participation in discussions and decision making about their own futures is fully integrated into service policy and planning. The service has developed imaginative processes for enabling this.

EVIDENCE:

The Manager for the Children Looked After team gave examples of how contact is promoted and supported to meet children/young people's assessed needs. Contact arrangements also takes into account the needs and wishes of parents and significant others.

Examples were given of how complex situations are managed to ensure the best outcomes for children/young people and their families and to ensure that

contact appointments are meaningful and a positive experience for the child/young person and their families.

Contact arrangements were very clearly set out on children/young people's files examined. Good communication between Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers with regard to contact matters was also apparent. This was based on records of discussions with Foster Carers.

One young person was very positive about the support and intervention from the Fostering Service who helped to facilitate contact between them and members of their extended family.

Foster Carers are provided with training on contact. Where necessary, foster carers are supported financially if they incur any costs when accompanying children/young people on contact appointments.

The Fostering Service consults with children/young people in a number of ways including:

- Discussions with children/young people during supervision meetings with Foster Carers. (One young person confirmed this).
- Children/young people's contribution to Foster Carer reviews.
- Children/young people's contribution to their reviews.
- Monthly consultation group for Foster Carers own children.
- Support group for BME (Black Minority & Ethnic) children/young people in foster care.

Examples of consultation forms seen were:

- Culture for keeps consultation form.
- Consultation form on school and education.
- Statutory care review form.

The Independent Reviewing Officer explained that she meet with children/young people as often as possible to ensure that they are given the opportunity to fully contribute to their review. The questionnaire used to seek children/young people's views was being updated at the time of this inspection. The Independent Reviewing Officer meets with the Principal Service Manager to discuss strengths and findings from reviews. This is judged to be good practice.

One young person informed the Inspector that they are very happy with the way in which the Fostering Service/London Borough of Richmond consults with children/young people. The young person explained that communication between them and the current Social Worker is more positive than their previous experience.

The Fostering Manager was of the opinion that children/young people could be included more in recruitment processes and to engage young people in the

assessment of supported lodgings carers. It is anticipated that options for the latter would be considered around the summer 2007.

A guide is issued to all children/young people in foster care. In addition, all children/young people are issued with details of how to make a complaint. This includes a pre paid card, to be used for contacting the Complaints Officer.

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):

14 & 29 Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Fostering Service has developed links with other services including the Leaving Care Team to ensure that young people approaching adult are fully supported for semi/independent living.

More robust systems are being introduced for processing fostering allowances. This is also supported by policies to ensure that all allowances paid are justified.

EVIDENCE:

The Leaving Care Team is responsible for coordinating the young people's plans for moving on to semi or independent living. The Fostering Manager confirmed that Pathway Plans were in place for young people preparing for semi or independent living.

One young person confirmed that they had received information about the Leaving Care Team and how this team would be involved in their future welfare.

The Leaving Care Team works closely with the Fostering Team and the Children Looked After-Social Work Team to plan transition arrangements for young people moving on.

Foster Carers are provided with training on how to support young people preparing for young adult hood and moving on to semi/independent living.

A policy on allowances was in place. This policy is subject to annual review. Fostering allowances are reviewed annually and take into account the rate of inflation and national minimum allowances.

Details relating to fostering allowances are also included in the Foster Carers Handbook.

Two Foster Carers confirmed that their allowances are paid on time.

Two significant changes have been made with regard to fostering allowances since the last inspection as follows:

- Fostering allowances paid to Foster Carers are in keeping with new Government Regulations whereby allowances and reward payments are clearly identified.
- The Fostering Team will be responsible for processing foster carer allowances as opposed to the current arrangement whereby allowances are processed by the Children Looked After Social Worker Teams.

Currently, there are no guidelines or consistency to evidence what allowances are paid to children/young people. The Fostering Manager was in the process of reviewing this with a view to implementing guidelines for Foster Carers to create a more transparent way in which allowances are distributed. This proposal is highly commended. Progress towards this will be monitored at the next inspection.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1, 5, 16, 17, 19, 21, 24, 25 & 32

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Managers are well qualified and experienced and supported by the wider organisation. Managers ensure that working practices, processes and systems are comprehensive and support good practice.

The management, staff and service culture is open and inclusive as demonstrated by the ways in which it addresses for example, feedback, complaints, equality and diversity; the individual needs of children/young people and Foster Carers.

The service has made outstanding improvements over the last year. This is evident throughout policies, records of meetings, business plans and feedback from a range of staff, Foster Carers and other key professionals.

Good progress has been made with policies and strategies for the assessment and support of kinship carers.

EVIDENCE:

A Statement of Purpose was in place. This document was comprehensive and contained a wealth of information. The content was in keeping with the criteria as set out in standard 1.4 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. Elected Members approved the Statement of Purpose.

A Children's Guide was in place. This Guide includes a summary of the aims and objectives of the service and details about being Looked After.

There were very clear lines of accountability in place. Observations and feedback from staff and Foster Carers indicated that staff worked well as a team and management were consistent and supportive.

The service is to be commended for the management systems in place for monitoring referrals, placements/matching, assessments/approvals and reviews.

The Fostering Team confirmed that they receive "hands-on" support and professional supervision and appraisals. Staff gave examples of the style of management and conduct of managers, who they described as being interactive, approachable, positive and have brought about fresh ideas for service improvement.

It was evident, that regardless of status, all staff worked well as a team and had established positive working relationships with other departments and key professionals.

Staff views (Fostering Team) about the service were as follows

- Staff support each other.
- Proud to be working for a "hard-working" service.
- Managers are very supportive.
- Different departments work well to support the Fostering Service.
- Good resources are provided for foster carers.
- A good balance is maintained with the way in which children/young people and foster carers are supported.
- The service has improved. It feels safe and well managed.
- Standards of work are very high.
- The service is "user" led.
- Staff are able to express their views without prejudice.

Staff confirmed that they have access to training programme specifically designed for the Fostering Team. In addition, they also have access to the corporate training programme.

There is adequate administrative support within the team. Two administrative staff spoken to demonstrated good organisation skills and were competent about their roles within the team.

The Fostering Manager was very complementary about the efficiency and professionalism within the staff team. The Fostering Manager described the staff team as being competent, trusting and committed. The Fostering Manager has implemented changes over the last year with full support from the staff team.

Seven Social Workers from the Children Looked After team completed questionnaires for the purpose of this inspection. Six out of the seven questionnaires included views and comments relating to conduct and performance of the Fostering Team. A summary of these views and comments were as follows:

- Better feedback needs to be given to Children's Social Workers following visits to foster carers.
- The service was rated as being "inadequate" because Supervising Social Workers do not provide Social Workers in the Children Looked After Team with information about the child/young person.
- There is a need for more specialist Foster Carers.
- More involvement is needed from Foster Carers with regard to education.
- Equality and diversity (cultural) needs of young people need to be promoted more.
- Six Social Workers stated that fostering placements are "resource" led as opposed to "needs" led.

- There needs to be a better balance with regard to placement stability.
- Supervising Social Workers need to get to know children/young people more.
- Supervising Social Workers should be responsible for processing additional costs claimed by Foster Carers as opposed to the Children Looked After Team.
- Foster Carers do not feel confident in raising matters with their Supervising Social Workers.
- Children/young people are not seen or consulted by Supervising Social Workers.

One Social Worker did not make specific comments as above but did rate aspects of the service as being good or excellent.

One Social Worker described Foster Carers in their experience as being excellent.

All views and comments made by the Children Looked After Team were discussed with the Principal Service Manager and the Fostering Manager at the start of the inspection. The Principal Service Manager was asked to explore these comments with the team during the period of the inspection. As a result, the Principal Service Manager provided a detailed report of his findings and explained that further work will be undertaken to ascertain how Social Workers from this team reached their views about the Fostering Service.

The Inspector can confirm that based on findings throughout this inspection, the above views and comments were not upheld or founded. The findings and outcomes of this inspection indicated that the Fostering Team are committed to ensuring the best outcomes for children/young people and Foster Carers. Examples of this are explained throughout the body of this report.

The Inspector visited one household where Foster Carers were very experienced and had a "natural" approach when speaking with the young person entrusted to their care. The young person in this household spoke very positively about the Foster Carer's Supervising Social Worker and confirmed that he/she is interested in their welfare and confirmed that they do have discussions during the Foster Carers supervision meetings.

On another visit, it appeared that the child/young person was settled and had a good relationship with their kinship carers. The kinship carers were very recently approved but spoke positively about the conduct and support from their Supervising Social Worker. The child/young person also referred to the Supervising Social Worker by name.

A Foster Carer recruitment strategy was in place. Publicity events have been scheduled for the next three months. Various venues and media will be used to promote fostering. The re-branding of the fostering logo is more colourful and

child focused. Merchandise used for promoting the service includes large posters, pens, fridge magnets and key rings.

The competencies as set out under standard 17.6 and 17.7 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services are included in the Skills to Foster training. The training pack seen was very informative, professionally presented and included supporting evidence for some of the topics covered such as education and health.

The Foster Carers training programme was highly commended. The programme known as the "Learning and Development Guide" was professionally presented, very comprehensive and included a wide range of courses and workshops. Each course included vital information such as:

- Date, time and venue.
- Who the course is for.
- What the course is about.
- Materials required.
- Name and details of the Facilitator.

Foster Carers are required to adhere to training requirements as follows:

- Mandatory training must be completed within the first two years of approval.
- Foster Carers must attend the minimum of three courses every year.

Foster Carers are paid £125.00 for each course attended up to the maximum of £375.00 per year.

Effective systems were in place for supporting Foster Carers. One Foster Carer spoken to described the service as being "excellent" and said that the Out of Office service was as efficient as other services provided.

The Fostering Manager confirmed that all Foster Carer annual reviews were up to date. An Independent Reviewing Officer conducts annual reviews. Records examined confirmed this.

Foster Carers are visited every four to six weeks including unannounced visits. Foster Carers confirmed this. Supervision agreements were in place for all Foster Carers. This is judged to be good practice.

Opportunities were being explored to set up a support group for women.

The Fostering Team were of the opinion that they have established good working relationships with the children/young people's Social Workers. Staff were also of the opinion that communication between the teams was good. However, in light of the comments made by the children/young people's Social Workers as already mentioned, there appears to be a big difference of opinion between the two teams. The Principal Service Manager should notify the

Regulatory Body of the findings and outcomes after further work is undertaken to explore why these comments were made. This recommendation is made under Standard 21.6 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

The children/young peoples files examined were maintained to a very high standard. The files contained all relevant information required for inspection purposes. Records all gave very clear evidence of the children/young people's assessed needs and how those needs are met.

The quality of foster carers files examined was exemplary. Records included initial assessments, supervisory records, contact and communication, finances, training and matters relating to children/young people placed with Foster Carers.

All other files and records examined were available and of a high standard. These records included:

- Fostering Team service plan for the period 2006/07.
- Specialist Children's Services – service plan 2006/07.
- Equalities action plan.
- Training strategy.
- Recruitment strategy (Foster Carers).
- Buddy Service proposal.
- Management/quality assurance reports.
- Financial proposals including a fostering allowance proposal based on outcomes of regional and national research carried out by the Fostering Manager.
- Kinship care proposals.

All records required for this inspection under Schedules 2, 3 & 7 of the Fostering Regulations 2002 were in place and well maintained.

For the purpose of this inspection, the Fostering Manager completed the following CSCI (Commission for Social Care) documents:

- AQAA (Annual Quality Assurance Assessment).
- Data Set.
- Policy check.

The AQAA was completed in full and was consistent with the findings throughout this inspection and all other types of information provided.

The service provides the same level of support, supervision and training for kinship (family and friends) carers as for mainstream foster carers. There have been significant changes to the way in which kinship carers are assessed. The assessment methodology has been revised. An information guide for kinship carers has also been introduced.

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	4
6	3
8	4
9	4
15	3
30	3

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	4
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	X
5	4
16	4
17	4
18	X
19	4
20	X
21	3
22	X
23	X
24	4
25	4
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	3

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS15FS15	20 Schedule 1	Positive proof of identity including a recent photograph must be available for all foster carers.	31/05/07

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.	FS21FS21	The Principal Service Manager should notify the Regulatory Body of the findings and outcomes after further work is undertaken to explore why comments were made by the Children Looked After Team about the conduct and performance of the Fostering Team.

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