



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Bolton Children`s Services - Fostering

**Endeavour House
98 Water Meetings Road
The Valley
Bolton
Lancashire
BL1 8SW**

Lead Inspector
Lynn O Driscoll

Key Announced Inspection
18th-21st 25th & 27th September & 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Bolton Children`s Services - Fostering
Address	Endeavour House 98 Water Meetings Road The Valley Bolton Lancashire BL1 8SW
Telephone number	01204 337480
Fax number	01204 337489
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 13th March 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

The stated overall aim of Bolton's fostering service is -

'To safeguard, support and promote the best interests of children, young people and their families through the provision of fostering services, which ensure stable, secure, safe and effective care for all children'.

One specific objective is to recruit locally, sufficient foster carers to provide a range of placements, including specialist placements such as for older children or those with special needs or from minority ethnic groups.

Core fostering services are provided by the Family Placement Team and short break care for disabled children by Bolton Shared Care. Both services have Asian foster carers utilised by neighbouring authorities.

Each team recruits, assesses, supports, supervises and reviews foster carers. There are two workers specifically employed to develop these services to kinship carers and an Asian carer within both teams to support Asian carers.

A support group for children of carers is provided by the family placement team, and an experienced carer.

Representation services for fostered children are available through BYPASS, an advocacy service.

A wide range of relevant training courses are provided to staff and carers through the Department's Training Section.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was called a "*proportionate key inspection*" which means all the key standards and the Regulations still needed to be looked at, but any good practice from the last Inspection in March could be included in this report.

It took place over six days and during that time staff, foster panel members, carers and young people's files were read, home visits were made, meetings with managers and staff took place and the fostering panel, the review panel and a training session were observed.

The fostering service also sent some information called the "*data set*" and the "*annual quality assurance assessment*" (aqaa) to the Commission before the start of the inspection which helped the inspectors to decide what to concentrate on during the visit.

A few weeks before the inspection, questionnaires were sent to young people aged 9 years and over, parents, carers and social workers and their replies are also included in this report.

What the service does well:

The service helps to keep young people fit and healthy.

Most of the young people who returned a questionnaire said that they "*always*" feel well cared for. One wrote, "*my carers look after me well*"

The bedrooms seen provided sufficient space and were age appropriately decorated and furnished and there were lots of toys and/or electrical equipment

A high priority is given to meeting educational needs. 10 out of 13 young people who returned a questionnaire said they "*always*" receive the right help.

The fostering panel and the review panel are both examples of good practice.

The service makes sure children and young people enjoy positive contacts with family and friends.

The shared care team have really developed participation/consultation opportunities for disabled children and young people.

Bolton keeps it's staff and they enjoy their work.

The majority of the carers were satisfied with the support received from the service.

Most were very happy with the increase in payments

There are good systems in place to provide important information and statistics to make sure the service meets needs. The data set and aqa were really detailed.

The service benefits from a very experienced Management team who are committed to improving upon an already good service and have always used the inspection process constructively. They are child focussed, very knowledgeable about individual carers and they are approachable.

There are good training opportunities for carers and the courses are of a good quality. Training can be provided on a one to one basis in a carer's own home, in Urdu and gujurati, at carer friendly times and with crèche facilities.

Carers are represented in recruiting, training, and supporting other carers, developing policies and on forums with councillors where all ages are represented and specialist Asian carers

The support group for carer's own children is well established.

What has improved since the last inspection?

As found with every inspection, there has been significant improvements since March.

Staff are beginning to recognise the benefits of splitting into a fostering team and an adoption team. They can now really focus on improving the fostering service.

The majority of looked after children and young people have a dentist

All carers have an allocated supervising social worker and are being visited at least once every two months

There was much better understanding around safe caring.

Health and safety checks are completed in time for discussion at the carer's annual review

Family placement carers have better access to the training offered by the shared care team.

Most of the family and friends carers have had their first review.

The supervisory visit pro forma includes a section on diaries as a reminder for supervising social workers to look at them

The specialist agency employed to do the recruitment of carers has proved effective

What they could do better:

All staff files must include in them the legal information set out in Schedule 1 and criminal record checks should be renewed every three years.

Not all the young people who returned a questionnaire were clear about how to complain.

Some carers are still accepting placements without basic documentation and not all carers are completing diaries.

Some carers shared their anxieties around supervising contact. It was suggested that it had "*crept into their role*" with no training.

At the last inspection in March staff in the fostering team were feeling the impact of the split as most of their colleagues chose to go into the adoption team. Vacancies have been covered by Agency staff but a number of carers are looking forward to being allocated a permanent supervising social worker who they can build up a relationship with, after a number of recent changes.

They would also like a choice of support groups to attend including different age ranges of children cared for, carers of disabled children and family and friends carers.

The building is still overly warm and you can still hear what other people are saying in adjoining rooms.

The fostering service must make sure other Local Authorities 's are undertaking the agreed service level agreement with Bolton to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended 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

Quality in the outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a six day visit to the service.

The arrangements in place for promoting the health and development of fostered children and young people are good.

EVIDENCE:

The Annual Quality Assurance Assessment (AQAA) forwarded to the Commission from this fostering service reads, *"in all the health measures for LAC (under age 5 assessments, dental care, annual health assessments and immunisations up to date) Bolton performed better than the National average"*

A policy on promoting the health needs of Looked After Children is available on request and the carers' handbook has a specific section on health issues. Foster carers must attend the core skills training on health which has recently been extended to include sexual health. All carers now have access to Bolton Shared Care's training programme which includes the management of epilepsy, asthma, tube feeding, tracheostomy care and first aid. Targeted training is also provided to carers of teenagers on substance issues.

Of the 15 young people who returned questionnaires, 10 said they *"always"* get support and advice about being healthy, 4 ticked *"usually"* and 1 *"sometimes"*. Examples given were that carers tell them to *"eat well and keep clean"*, *"eat fruit"* and *"my meals always consist of vegetables!!-especially greens"*

All of the four children visited were fit and healthy and were registered with a GP and a dentist, immunisations were up to date and statutory medicals undertaken. The carers spoken to were also clear about their expectation to

maintain health records and appointments, which is then shared in statutory reviews.

In response to the findings at the last inspection in regard to difficulties in accessing dentists, a letter was sent out to all dental practices from the Director of Public Health highlighting the need to give looked after children priority. Secondly this is now specifically raised at every statutory review and if the child does not have a dentist this is fed back to the PCT by senior managers. Consequently the inspector found a marked improvement. Out of the 27 carers who attended the support group 3 children in their care were without a dentist. There was clear documentary evidence that the two young people identified at the last inspection in March have since both seen a dentist.

The sample of children's files read and visits to carer's homes on this occasion evidenced that holistic health needs are identified and met. There is a CAMHS team in place, which includes a clinical psychologist and a senior social worker emotional health who work alongside the senior LAC nurse. Carers also have access to 360 which is a multi agency substance misuse team for under 19's.

The AQAA states that *"there is close liaison with the Community Paediatrician, GP's and School nurses"* and that *"looked after children are part of the target group for teenage pregnancy services"* which includes *"a specially designated young person's town centre based health centre"*.

At one carer's annual review which took place during this inspection the child's social worker specifically commented on the fact that the carer *"advocates well to get the specialist health services the children require"* and *"manages both boys needs who have complex emotional needs"*.

Another wrote *"the baby's weight gain is steady"* and *"his development reflects the stimulation provided by his carers"*.

Over the next twelve months the fostering service intends to work closely with the looked after children's emotional health and well being team to ensure fostering service staff receive training in Webster Stratton techniques and are planning to extend the Healthy Homes Initiative led by the LAC nurse and piloted in the children's homes, to foster homes.

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 and 30

Quality in the outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a six day visit to the service.

Overall there are good arrangements in place to ensure fostered children and all members of the carer's household remain safe, but a basic safeguard is ensuring all staff files, including review and full panel members, hold the required information and CRB's are reviewed every three years.

EVIDENCE:

Bolton Fostering Service has a particularly good management team who are very committed to positive change. They are suitably qualified and very experienced. As also found on previous inspections, staff and carers spoke of their accessibility and continued support and guidance.

The homes visited as part of this inspection were clean and comfortable. The bedrooms were shared but the young people were happy with this arrangement and they provided sufficient space and were age appropriately decorated and furnished.

There was good evidence that annual health and safety checks are completed prior to carer's review and questions about smoking have now been included on the pro forma. One seen was not dated, but the social worker was spoken to and confirmed it had been updated in September when he took over the case. Health and safety training is provided to carers.

The assessed needs of the young people visited were being met and good matches were found.

In March there were two identified carers who had not had placements for some time yet others were over numbers for the same age group. One of the carers was seen and confirmed she now has a placement and the other has resigned and is applying to an independent agency. A letter was written by the manager and the Agency came to read the file to ensure they were fully informed of the issues. Another identified carer from a previous inspection has been de registered.

There are still four carers over numbers but the manager of the fostering service told panel members that there is now a much tighter system in place for exemptions which includes an application in writing addressing any issues for the children already placed which has to be agreed by the Head of Service and is then regularly monitored by the review panel.

The children and young people spoken during this inspection felt safe in their current placement and 13 out of the 15 young people who returned a questionnaire ticked that they "*always*" feel well cared for where they are living now and two ticked "*usually*". Comments included "*they treat me correctly and how you should be and they teach me things*" and, "*I just feel safe and I'm always feeling great about myself*"

They also knew who to speak to if they were not happy or had a personal problem which included their carers, teachers and social workers. 50% however said they were not sure how to make a complaint should they ever need to which must be addressed. (see also Standard 1 under the "Management" section of this report)

It was also found that some carers were still not being provided with basic written information about the child or young person prior to placement.

At the last inspection it was found that all carers were trained in child protection but not all those visited were clear about specific safe caring in their

own homes. This was discussed with the management team at the outset of this inspection. In response the manager of shared care confirmed that this is being re visited as essential training to their carers and they are all given guidance booklets. In the family placement team this is now being specifically explored during supervisory visits having received the training material from staff development. The AQAA states that there is now "*significant emphasis in preparation groups to assist in safe caring to prevent abuse which is then followed up with post approval training*". It is also part of the assessment process for new carers. All adults in the household are required to attend the training and the service confirmed in their AQAA that this will be specifically monitored over the next twelve months. Those carers visited during this inspection were clear about their safe caring policy.

Records of Complaints and allegations since the last inspection were examined and discussed with the manager of the service evidencing that they are all taken seriously, fully investigated, outcomes reached and actions put in place as required. One complaint is ongoing and the service have agreed to keep the Commission informed of their findings.

All of the young people spoken to and those who returned a questionnaire stated that they were not being bullied. There was documentary evidence that the young person identified at the last inspection who was being bullied at School was addressed and the situation is being closely monitored.

Staff files were examined at the human resources section to find they had improved since the last inspection but they still did not include all the particulars as required by Schedule 1. This is an outstanding legal requirement and must be given priority attention. All Panel members files must also include the same information.

The inspector observed the fostering panel and the review panel to find continued good practice in both. The review panel is chaired by the head of the service, a team leader from the fostering service and one from the children and families team and a quality assurance officer. The atmosphere was very relaxed and consequently carers felt able to share in detail the highs and lows of the last twelve months. A loyalty bonus of £500 is given to carers following their review which is now more closely linked to attending required training courses.

Papers for the fostering panel are received in good time for members to fully prepare themselves. Relevant questions were asked and the expertise of the panel was very evident. Conflicts of interest were declared and any exemptions

discussed. There was also evidence of members exercising their quality assurance function. For first reviews the children's social worker presents a written report, which includes children's views.

A recent and significant development is that carers are now invited to attend panel and are given time to consider three questions to enable them to feel more comfortable and to give informed answers.

Panel members spoken to were particularly impressed with their recent training on competency based assessments and members attended early on the day of panel to look in detail at some completed portfolios.

At the end of the agenda a quality assurance officer provided some very useful statistics about the fostering service and as importantly clearly explained their significance. This detailed report showed that 71% of looked after children in Bolton are in foster placements, children placed with kinship carers is higher than the national average and there has been a 30% reduction in the use of Agency placements in the last twelve months which is nearly half the national average.

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 and 31

Quality in the outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a six day visit to the service.

There are good arrangements in place for enjoying and achieving.

EVIDENCE:

Bolton has a valuing diversity policy in place which is reflected in the recruitment and training of staff. The AQAA also confirms that an equality impact assessment is undertaken on all new policies and service developments as is legally required.

The service's stated aim in their AQAA is to "*recruit a diverse pool of carers to meet children's individual needs*" and their stated intention is to improve take up of all services by ethnic minority groups and to be "*aware of and responsive to local changes to minority communities in Bolton, particularly the impact of asylum seekers*".

An Asian worker was employed in the family placement team to recruit and support Asian/Muslim carers to better reflect the local community. This has

been so successful that they now offer placements to other Authorities. As requested, core training is now provided in Urdu.

Bolton shared care specifically recruit carers for disabled children from a variety of cultural backgrounds and continue to provide a good range of courses to give them the specific skills to meet individual needs and to maximise their potentials. This service also has an Asian resource worker employed to support Asian disabled children and their families.

Given the high percentage of kinship carers excellent matches in respect to culture, religion and language are achieved.

In response to the question, in your opinion how well does the fostering service address issues of equality and diversity such as culture, ethnicity and disability? of the social worker's who responded two ticked "excellent", six ticked good and one ticked adequate. One commented that a Tameside boy was placed with Bolton who provided a specialist Asian family to meet his religion, language and cultural needs. He confirmed Bolton fostering service worked closely with Tameside and that they provide an "*exceptional service*"

In March the inspectors identified one young woman whose independence was being restricted by conflicting cultural and gender expectations. Examination of her file evidenced that these issues have been addressed including the provision of a mobile phone and a computer and linking up with another young woman of a similar age and from the same cultural background.

The fostering service continues to give high priority to meeting the educational needs of looked after children and recent developments have included the production of child friendly and age appropriate learning and development plans, training on Personal Education Plans offered to carers and staff and the recruitment of three learning mentors whose specific role is to liaise with carers, social workers and schools to avoid exclusion. Personal Education Plan meetings are arranged as needed where specific targeted work in the foster carers home will be agreed to integrate the young person back into school.

An educational psychologist is also now available at the support group offering individual consultations to carers.

Of the 15 young people who returned questionnaires- 10 said they "always" receive the right help so they can be successful in their education and 2 ticked "usually". Comments included getting extra support at school, positive

feedback from teachers and receiving recognition from the education achievement fund. One young person wrote *"if I behave all year I get a cheque"*.

All the children visited during this inspection were in School, progressing well and getting any additional support needed which included speech and language therapy and help with reading, One carer spoken to had successfully got a young person into a new School within one week of placement and she is continuing to attend. Another carer met escorts two boys to a school in a taxi every day and the service funds a breakfast club. She said *"they are both doing fine at School"*.

Bolton Shared Care continues to provide a flexible, needs led, short break service to disabled children and their families. This is separately resourced and is well managed by a very committed, experienced, child centred and competent individual.

Feedback during this inspection as with previous inspections, evidences that this service remains highly valued by parents and helps them to continue to care for their own child in the long term.

The carers also remain particularly pleased with the support they receive from their link worker and one has moved from an independent agency mainly because of the support received from Bolton.

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 and 11

Quality in the outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a six day visit to the service.

Overall the arrangements in place to promote positive contact are good but some carers may benefit from receiving training and/or additional support before supervising contact. Secondly they should all be recording any impact on the child before or after contact in diaries.

The opportunities for looked after children to make positive contributions are excellent. In particular, Bridges, of which the shared care team are a part, have really progressed participation/consultation opportunities for disabled children and young people in the last twelve months.

EVIDENCE:

Examination of files and home visits provided good evidence that contact with significant others continues to be actively promoted in line with legal directions and young people's choices. At the carer's support group, however, there was concern about being asked to supervise contact. Some argued that they were not trained to do this, some felt uncomfortable advising parents and others felt threatened. They said the contact team is increasing "*but there are clearly not enough of them*"

This led to a discussion about the planning process and the fact that contact arrangements should be discussed and agreed prior to placement, specified in the placement agreement and regularly reviewed. It then became evident that

some carers are still accepting placements without basic paperwork including a risk assessment.

The importance of recording any changes in children's behaviour before or after contact was also raised which then highlighted the fact that not all had and/or were using their diaries.

Since the last inspection, supervising social workers are now expected to read diaries as part of their visits and to record this on the pro forma which should address this issue. Secondly 2007 diaries will be given to carers at the next supervisory visit and it was advised that they are asked to sign for them.

In March the inspectors acknowledged that the shared care team as part of the overall Bridges Services have focused on innovative ways of improving consultation/participation in the last twelve months and this was explored in more depth on this occasion.

They raised the profile some eighteen months ago building on the research undertaken by the team leader as part of her masters degree. They considered the Department's 39 participation standards and the initial and main reaction from most of the staff was that it was not relevant to their service, yet today they have assessed every one. A huge shift, recognised by the inspector, has been in staff's attitude across the service and the manager emphasised how proud she was of her particular team.

Activity includes a well attended and established forum which meets once a month to develop participation.

In May 50 disabled children and young people attended taster sessions in drama, music and filming which progressed to a film project over the summer holidays at the Octagon Theatre. The title was "Dream Machine" and the children were fully involved in designing it, choosing and making the costumes and props, the music and writing and performing their own songs. It includes actual dreams and hopes and aspirations and the premier showing of the DVD is on 19th October at Bolton School.

The staff who organised it had very high expectations of those who took part which the children and young people responded positively to. This proved to be a very humbling and moving experience for parents and social workers alike. One manager said *"it was lovely to see them blossom-we are so proud of them"*. Another said *"It offered really really fantastic opportunities and there have been great spin offs from it"*.

One young person with a physical disability, for example, enrolled with the theatre and another won the annual award of "*outstanding performance in the arts*". There was an article in the Manchester Evening News, The Big Issue and in an internal newsletter called scene. As importantly the manager of shared care was very clear that this was not just a one off event and "No Nonsense" are coming to discuss continued opportunities.

Also over the summer fifteen Bridges staff including carers, did a "*photo voice*" project over the summer with disabled children and young people and again they excelled themselves. One young person's title was "*where I live*" and took photos, for example, of a burnt out car and rubbish on the streets.

The Manager of shared care also sits on a departmental participation group which meets once every two months and is currently exploring how to include disabled young people in the staff recruitment and selection process. In preparation, children and young people involved in Bridges have produced "*my ideal worker*".

There are also two young people on the Cash Panel which makes decisions about awards given as part of the Youth Opportunities Fund and another disabled young person is on the "what works works" training which considers matters of, for example, constitutions and child protection. The Manager told the inspector "*people are bending over backwards to include us and to consider what the issues might be*". The Inspector believes people will also feel more comfortable to ask questions and to improve practice given her personality and dedication.

In statutory reviews Bridges use photos to depict the last six months and to help represent young people's views. The AQQA also states that "*staff have benefited from the development of Person Centred Planning which enables them to better represent young people's views in reviews*".

There was a young people's event in Bolton last September entitled "Future Search" and some looked after children did attend. The Manager of shared care described it as "*hugely impressive*" but she did send feedback as to how to make improvements next year to better include children with learning difficulties.

The Manager said one of her workers, who is relatively young and disabled has done "*exceptionally well in gaining young people's confidence*" She says "*he goes above and beyond*" his job description. He has four drop in sessions mid

week at Starbucks at the Reebok and social skills and friendships are being developed. As a direct consequence two young people are doing well in mainstream school and are supporting each other there.

One young person with chronic epilepsy initially came with dad, who then went to the pub for a while and then eventually went home. He has now got a sitter from Bridges which enables dad to go out. The Manager stressed that *"this has never been achieved with this family before"*

This worker has also set up a web cam for another young person with muscular dystrophy who is very poorly at the moment and spends considerable periods in bed. This enables him to regularly communicate with all his friends.

The family placement team are soon to undertake their own self assessment against the participation standards and an action plan formulated which could be explored in a future inspection.

Bolton actively encourage looked after children to attend and contribute to their statutory reviews. In 2005 90% contributed which is higher than the national average. They are independently chaired and minutes taken and any issues raised by the young people are feedback to the managers. All looked after children also have direct access to BYPASS, an independent advocacy service who will represent them at statutory reviews if they wish need them to. The reviewing officers with the input of looked after young people, have redesigned the review consultation forms in a more child friendly format.

Thirteen questionnaires were returned from young people placed with family placement carers. Of those five said that they *"always"* get help to think about their future, five ticked *"usually"* and three *"sometimes"*. One wrote *"I have told my carer I want to be a designer and she is going to teach me how to sew"*.

In answering the question-do carers listen to you and take notice of your opinions, eight ticked *"always"*, three *"usually"*, one *"sometimes"* but one ticked *"never"* which the manager agreed to explore. Comments included *"she listens and takes on board what I say"* and *"because if I don't listen to them-they wont listen to me-so I listen to them and they listen to me"*.

The same question was asked about their social worker and there was a wider range of responses. Four ticked "always", six "usually", two "sometimes" and two "never". Comments ranged from "takes me to McDonalds where we talk" to "never seen-only once since Christmas-maybe twice". This information was shared with the manager of field social workers.

Young people were actively involved in the development of the www.plodge.org.uk website specifically for looked after children in Bolton. The AQQA stated that this "offers young people the opportunity to express their views in a very wide way" and monitoring figures shows that there were 216 visits to the fostering pages in July and that 69 young people contributed their art work to the site in the same month.

Young people in foster care were also actively involved in a preparation pack for looked after children which includes information on rights, procedures, complaints, health issues and bullying.

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 and 29

Quality in the outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a six day visit to the service.

The service ensures economic wellbeing for looked after young people and their carers.

EVIDENCE:

Standard 14 was not explored from a specific young person's and carer's perspective as those chosen cancelled two appointments and it was not possible to rearrange again within the inspection period.

All looked after young people in Bolton are allocated a qualified leaving care worker prior to their sixteenth birthday and together they agree a Pathway Plan which is regularly reviewed.

The AQAA states that LASE, the corporate work experience scheme *"has made a significant contribution to the economic wellbeing of both looked after and care leavers"* and *"They are now engaging with years 10 and 11 to ease transition to further education and training"*

At the outset of the inspection the management team highlighted the fact that payments to carers have *"gone up significantly right across the board"* and most carers are *"absolutely delighted"*. One carer told a manager *"it has*

changed my life and that of the child I care for" and the Inspector observed another carer at her annual review telling the panel how pleased she was with this rise. Another carer visited who has worked for an independent agency was equally very pleased and made the point that the money she used to receive had to pay for everything but Bolton also pay clothing, birthday, Christmas and holiday allowances.

One Manager commented-*"we provide the whole package- and birthday and Christmas allowances have also doubled"*. He argued that it is now *"a very attractive package"* and he is quite confident that they are now paying more than the independent agencies. He said this was the only investment elected members made last year and it amounted to almost £1 million.

Carers of over 11's now receive £200 from £140 and under 11's £165 from £120. Enhanced carers now receive £425 compared to £300.

This have now financially enabled carers to only take on one child or young person. To give an example, one carer, now enhanced, has one young person in placement and receives £425. Previously as a mainstream carer for two she would have received £240 or £300 if she had been approved as a specialist PIP carer.

At the support group two carers told the inspector that they would like clarity about becoming an enhanced carer given the young people they care for. This was then discussed in detail with the team manager who agreed to personally pursue their concerns. Another told the inspector she was *"really struggling financially"* as she had no placements but the reasons given by the manager were quite appropriate and clearly recorded.

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):

1, 16, 17, 21, 23, 26 and 32

Quality in the outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a six day visit to the service.

Staff in the fostering teams continue to be well managed and supported . All carers have an allocated worker and are visited regularly but they are looking forward to the recruitment of permanent staff.

EVIDENCE:



The Statement of Purpose has recently been updated and it states clearly the aims and objectives of the fostering teams and accurately reflects the services provided. There is also an established system in place to ensure the document is reviewed by elected members once a year and amended as required.

The Children's Guide was also produced in two user friendly formats to meet the needs of different age groups and the pack includes a DVD on young people's rights which looked after children contributed to. Given that some young people said they were unsure how to complain it is strongly recommended that supervising social workers check and record at their next visits that they all have a copy and that they actively encourage carers to go through all this information with the children to ensure they fully understand their rights. (See also Standard 9 under the heading "Staying Safe")

Both the family placement team and the shared care team have a clear management structure and the staff spoken to confirmed manageable workloads, regular, good quality, formal supervision and good administrative support.

Just before the last inspection in March the service had just split into a fostering team and an adoption team. Staff had been given their choice of working in the fostering or the adoption team which is good practice, but this had resulted in insufficient staff to undertake the demands of the fostering service. Vacancies are now being covered by Agency staff so all consequently all the carers met at this inspection had a supervising social worker and were once again being visited every two months, but many are looking forward to building up a longer term relationship with a permanent supervising social worker.

As was found at the last inspection in March , some carers have experienced a number of changes –one notably was on their sixth link worker since last November- and since March four who attended the support group were on their third and seven were on their second. One carer spoken to at a training session told the inspector, "*in my opinion the problem has been the number of different link workers*" and argued "*you are only as strong as your link worker*". Another carer who has made a formal complaint also wrote that he didn't think it would have gone this far if he had had one permanent

supervising social worker. Another felt the Agency worker didn't really know her and consequently the placements she could realistically take on.

At this inspection it was found that recruitment to the vacant posts were near completion and a full complement of staff should be realised by November. One new worker commenced employ in August and two others have been appointed but are awaiting CRB's.

Carers at the support group suggested that it would be really nice to have a social event close to Christmas so they can meet the new team.

At the last inspection it was found that this service gives a high priority to staff and carer development and continued to offer a good range of training opportunities. Secondly, as recommended at the previous inspection, the preparation course had been revamped and managers had observed for themselves and were satisfied with the quality of the training. On this occasion the inspector observed a training session on "*communicating with children*". It was very well presented by two very knowledgeable and experienced trainers who ensured a good mix of direct input, a variety of small group exercises and large group discussions. Feedback from the participants spoken to was particularly positive. The times of the course enabled carers to take and collect children from school and there was a crèche for pre school children.

The revised foster care agreement, as recommended, emphasises the expectation that carers continue to attend courses and this is now specifically discussed at their annual review and more directly linked to their £500 bonus.

Areas for improvement at the previous inspection had included providing courses in Urdu and crèche facilities which had both been acted upon.

One carer told the review panel that she really appreciated the one to one specialist training in her own home by a Senior Social Work practitioner to help her care for two boys with complex emotional needs. This worker "*recognised a great difference in the boys*".

The majority of carers spoken to were satisfied with the support provided by the fostering service. One carer was observed telling the panel at her annual review that she receives "*excellent support-cant fault it-there is always somebody there*".

One carer visited told the inspector that she feels "*much more supported*" than she did working for an independent agency. Another carer visited described her supervising social worker as "*really good*" and a third carer spoken to described her new (and permanent) supervising social worker as "*fantastic*".

and one of the managers who offered additional support just when she needed it, as "*absolutely wonderful-brilliant*".

At was found at the last inspection, there is still only one support group running but carers were assured of a wider range once the team is fully staffed. In addition to age ranges, some carers of disabled children asked for a specific support group which the team leader of shared care confirmed could be provided, and others asked for a family and friends support group.

The children of foster carers support group continues to run on a regular basis.

The out of hours support is not being widely used and is consequently under review.

The family placement team are still experiencing problems with their new premises. It remains overly warm and airless and conversations can be heard in adjoining rooms so confidentiality cannot be assured. These problems continue to be addressed and in fact windows were being installed during the period of this inspection.

The family placement team include two posts established specifically to develop the recruitment, support and training of kinship carers. Since the last inspection priority has been given to ensuring they are all in the annual review system and as requested they are pursuing the possibility of a support group. Some carers have taken up the opportunity to attend training courses. One carer visited was very satisfied with the support provided by her supervising social worker but in stark contrast a carer who returned a questionnaire was very dissatisfied with the lack of support offered by Bolton. After speaking to the field social worker it became evident that a service level agreement is in place with another Local Authority who are being paid to provide more local and regular support but it would seem this is not occurring.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	2
15	1
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	2
11	4

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

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

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.	FS15	20 Schedule 1	Staff files, including panel members, must include all the required information as specified in Schedule 1 and CRB's should be renewed every three years. This is an outstanding legal requirement. The initial timescale of 05/06/05 has not been met.	30/11/06
2.	FS9	11	All carers must have detailed written information about the child/young person prior to placement to ensure needs can be met and to enable the carer to protect them and all other members of the household.	30/11/06
3.	FS17	19	That the service employs an adequate number of suitably experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the service.	30/11/06
4.	FS21	17	That the support groups are re-established once there is a full complement of staff.	30/11/06
5.	FS26	23	That the issues relating to the premises as identified in this and	31/03/07

			the previous report continue to be addressed.	
6.	FS32	35	The fostering service must monitor service level agreements made with other Local Authorities to ensure the protection and welfare of the children placed and to support the carers.	30/11/06

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.	FS9	Carers should be actively encouraged to spend time with the children and young people going through the Children's Guide and especially making sure that they know how to complain should they ever need to exercise this right.
2.	FS10	Given the issues raised at the support group, supervising social workers should ask carers to sign for their 2007 diaries as evidence of receipt, continue to read them as part of their visits to ensure they are being correctly completed and in particular to make sure they are recording any perceived impact on the child as a result of contact arrangements.
3.	FS10	Given that some carers feel uncomfortable supervising contact this should be specifically discussed during visits to try to identify any further training needs and/or additional support required to undertake this role.

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