



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

Cumbria County Council Family Placement Scheme

Social Services Department
Somerset House, Duke Street
Whitehaven
Cumbria
CA28 7SQ

3rd – 31st March 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Cumbria County Council Family Placement Scheme

Address

Social Services Department, Somerset House, Duke Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria, CA28 7SQ

Local Authority Manager

Janice Reynolds

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01946 852830

Address

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Fax No:

01946 852822

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janice.reynolds@cumbriacc.gov.uk

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply?

NO

Date of last inspection

08/09/03

Date of Inspection Visit		3rd March 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Stewart Waddell	121431
Name of Inspector	2	Anne Bannister	072806
Name of Inspector	3	Catherine Wilson	055939
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Janice Reynolds & Brenda Brodie	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

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Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
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- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
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D.2. Action Plan

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Cumbria County Council Family Placement Scheme. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Pre-inspection information received showed the Family Placement Service, operated by Cumbria Social Services, had, as of 01/02/05, a total of 300 Foster Carers, 63 of these being Family and Friends Foster Carers, and 17 of them Shared Carers. They offered a total of 523 registered places. At the time of inspection 417 young people were in foster care placements with the service.

The organisational structure was that the service was divided in to three divisional teams - East, South and West, each covering different geographical areas of the county. The service had developed its managerial structure since the last inspection – the service currently had a Team Manager (Procedures) and an Acting Team Manager (Operations) in place. It had been acknowledged by the authority that the continuous improvement process in the service required both Development and Operational Managers. There were four area offices sited throughout Cumbria – one each in Barrow, Carlisle, Kendal and Workington. Each of the four area office teams were managed by a Principal Social Worker. The Principal Social Worker in turn managed a team of Family Placement Officers including a Senior Practitioner. Each divisional team had a Training and Support Officers assigned to them. The service currently had a vacancy for a Principal Social Worker, and some vacant Family Placement Officer posts.

A reconfiguration of the Service had been undertaken in July 2002. This had been monitored throughout an eighteen-month period. This reconfiguration entailed the grouping of staff into two distinct sections – Recruitment & Assessment and Training & Support. A number of new posts have been created and filled – however, there remained a number of unfilled posts within the Service. In pre-inspection documentation completed the service manager referred to “serious staffing recruitment issues” that had “undermined the configuration process”.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

1.Statement of Purpose (Standard 1.)

This standard was not assessed at this inspection

2.Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2 - 3. Only Standard 3 was assessed. This standard was met.)

The Team Manager (Procedures) and the Acting Team Manager (Operations) were both suitably qualified and experienced to manage the service.

3.Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5. Only Standard 5 was assessed. This standard was met.)

The management of the service had been re-structured since the last inspection – with the aim of ensuring a continuous improvement in the delivery of service to young people and foster carers. The new structure has seen the creation of a dual managerial team – the service now having a Team Manager (Procedures) and an Acting Team Manager (Operations). During inspection the managers demonstrated they had an appropriate working knowledge of the service’s policies and procedures. They also displayed a sound grasp of the practicalities involved in the daily running of the service, and were aware of areas of practice that needed improvement.

4.Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6 to 14. 8 of the 9 standards were assessed – 5 of those standards were met.)

The inspector’s priority during this inspection was to assess the outcomes for the young people in foster care with the service. Evidence viewed, and from responses received from young people, both in interviews during inspection and in the 61 completed questionnaires received, showed that young people, almost unanimously, were very positive in their views about the care they received, and the foster carers that they were placed with.

Inspectors visited six homes of foster carers during the inspection. Foster carers interviewed at their homes stated that, generally, they were given appropriate resources to meet the individual needs of young people placed with them. The service were now in the position of being able to ensure all foster carers were subject to annual reviews of approval. Foster carers files viewed evidenced annual health and safety checks and risk assessments were carried out on the foster carers homes – however, although risk assessments had been carried out, they had not been signed or dated.

There was evidence to show that, in placements that required Form F’s to be completed, appropriate matching procedures and processes had been followed. However, in other cases, some of the files viewed by inspectors had little evidence recorded to show that appropriate matching processes had been followed. Foster carers interviewed stated that, generally, young people placed with them had never visited the home before coming to live there – most placement discussions appearing to be conducted over the telephone. All foster carers interviewed displayed an appropriate knowledge of child protection issues and how to report any concerns. Young people did not raise any issues regarding contact with their birth families – one young person detailed to inspectors the arrangements for her contact with siblings, parents and grandparents. The majority of the 61 young people who completed pre-inspection questionnaires stated their foster carers regularly sought their views and opinions. However less than half said they were consulted on their views about the fostering service. A feature of the completed young persons questionnaires received was that the majority of young people stated they were eating healthier foods since being placed at their foster carers homes. Many also commented that they were regularly attending school and some stated their foster carers helped them with their homework.

Generally, foster carers were positive in their comments about the support they received from their family placement officers – although the vast majority of foster carers felt the service was under staffed. There was some criticism from foster carers about the lack of support some young people placed with them received from their social workers.

5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15 to 23. Only 5 of these 9 standards were assessed. 2 of the Standards were met.)

The Inspectors examined the files of all staff recruited since the last inspection. This evidenced that all staff had received appropriate Criminal Records Bureau disclosure certificates. However, the files viewed did not contain all the information and documentation required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations, 2002.

Foster carers files viewed evidenced that carers were receiving appropriate formal supervision from their Family Placement Officers. Most foster carers interviewed stated they received appropriate support and supervision from their Family Placement Officers. However, several foster carers were critical of the out of hours support received, and some directly referred to incidents where they felt they had not received suitable support from Emergency Duty Teams. Some foster carers detailed support systems they had established between themselves - assisting fellow foster carers in times of need. Some foster carers stated they found the support groups established in each division helpful, although not all carers managed to attend such group meetings.

The Training Support Officers were now well established in their roles. One such officer was allocated to each division. They had proven to be a valuable resource in assisting in the identifying of, and ensuring delivery of, appropriate training for foster carers. The service had carried out a Training Needs Analysis, and each foster carer had a Foster Carers Training Profile in their case files. However, some profiles observed in these files had not been updated or completed. One foster carer stated they had asked for specific training several years ago and it had not been forthcoming. Training Support Officers detailed how there was varied attendances at training days and courses delivered – some were well attended, others were under subscribed and poorly attended. Foster carers interviewed stated there was far more training provided now than there used to be, and they regularly received letters informing them what training had been organised and was available. Senior staff from the service informed inspectors that 70 foster carers had enrolled to study towards either B-TEC or NVQ qualifications.

6. Records (Standards 24 to 25. Only 1 standard was assessed. This standard was not met.)

The service had produced a new Procedures Handbook in July 2004. It contained a section on Children's Records, (Section 4.5). However, the section has not yet been fully developed and did not contain specific details on what requires to be recorded. It was the Inspectors view case records and files had improved significantly since the last inspection – however there were still areas requiring improvement. The quality of information in children's files was generally of an acceptable standard, although there were some minor areas requiring improvement. One file viewed contained much information relevant to the young person's siblings and not relevant to the young person themselves. The format of the young people's files had improved significantly since the last inspection. The files viewed contained much more detailed information on education and health issues. Generally, although most carers stated they received sufficient information on young people placed with them, a significant number stated they did not always receive appropriate information. Appropriate registers had now been established to meet the requirements of the regulations. Audit sheets at the front

of files highlighted deficits but had not been signed and dated to show that these deficits had been addressed.

7.Financial requirements (Standards 27 to 29. Only 1 standard was assessed. This standard was not met.)

Several foster carers interviewed highlighted problems they had encountered in receiving appropriate payments due to them. Some felt they had not been appropriately advised on the payment structure and procedures during their induction training. During interview with the inspectors, Family Placement Officers referred to problems some of their carers had encountered.

8.Fostering panels (Standard 30. This standard was met.)

The service had responded to requirements made following the last inspection and Divisional Approval Panels were now constituted in accordance with the standards and regulations. The Inspectors observed two panels during the inspection – one in Kendal and one in Carlisle. The inspectors also observed a Resource Allocation Panel held at Workington on 22/03/05. At the Divisional Approval Panels, the chairperson ensured the meetings were well structured and all panel members had the opportunity to raise any points they wished or address questions to presenting case workers. The inspectors were of the opinion some representing case workers had not come adequately prepared for the panel meeting, some reports presented were not comprehensive enough and, in some cases, the panel did not pursue some relevant issues rigorously enough.

One of the functions of the panels was to approve changes to the number of children that may be cared for by carers. Pre-inspection documentation evidenced that only five carers throughout the county were over their approved allocation limit – and in all cases a sibling group were amongst the young people accommodated. The foster panels were now being presented with annual reviews on all foster carers registered with the service.

9.Short-term breaks (Standard 31. This standard had been met.)

Pre-inspection information received showed that the service had 17 “Shared Carers”. The service had also responded to the need to recruit more such carers and a working party had been set up to address such issues. Plans such as a ring fenced advertising budget and improved payments to shared carers had been agreed.

10.Family and friends (Standard 32. This standard has been met.)

At the time of inspection the service had 63 “Family and Friends” Carers. The service ethos in relation to such carers was very appropriate. The service manager stated in pre-inspection documentation received that “Priority is given to placing children with family and friends as research indicated this has successful outcomes for children.”

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

YES

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
3	11	FS 8	The service must take appropriate measures to ensure that young people are matched with, and placed with, foster carers who are best equipped to meet the needs of the young person.	30/11/03
5	11 & 35	FS 11	The service must ensure that statutory visits to young people in their foster placements are carried out and young peoples opinions are sought over matters that affect their daily life.	30/11/03
10	17	FS 18	The service must ensure that appropriate out of hours management and support services are available to foster carers.	30/11/03
12	22	FS 24	The service must ensure it keeps up-to-date, comprehensive case records on each young person placed in foster care with them.	30/11/03

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Stewart Waddell	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Anne Bannister & Catherine Wilson	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Penny Wilkinson	Signature	_____
Date	07 June 2005		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	11	FS 8	The service must ensure that, in all relevant cases, appropriate matching processes and procedures are followed, and recorded, when making placements.	01/07/05
2	28	FS 8	The service must ensure Foster Care Agreements comply with all the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations, 2002.	01/07/05
3	17	FS 9	The service must ensure that foster carers receive all relevant information on the young people placed with them.	01/07/05
4	11 & 35	FS 11	The service must ensure all statutory visits to young people in foster placements take place.	01/07/05
5	20	FS 15	The service must ensure that staff recruitment procedures adhere to the requirements of Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations, 2002, and that staff recruitment files contain all relevant documentation required by Schedule 1.	01/07/05
6	17	FS 18	The service must ensure that appropriate out of hours support services are available to foster carers.	01/07/05

7	22	FS 24	The service must ensure it maintains up-to-date, comprehensive case records on each young person placed in foster care with them.	01/07/05
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GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS 6	The service should ensure all risk assessments carried out are signed and dated.
2	FS 9	The service should ensure that the Commission for Social Care Inspection are notified of relevant significant incidents within a reasonable timescale.
3	FS 17	The service should address the inequality in pay, terms and conditions that currently exist, to ensure it has the opportunity to attract, and retain, sufficient, suitable members of staff to meet the needs of the service.
4	FS 24	The service should consider creating a written policy for foster carers detailing what written records it requires them to keep in relation to the young people placed with them.
5	FS 24	The service should ensure the placements record sheet at the front of foster carers files includes a section to record why the placement was terminated.
6	FS 24	The service should ensure audit form sheets at the front of files are signed and dated to show when deficits highlighted have been appropriately addressed.
7	FS 29	The service should ensure that carers are fully aware of what fees and expenses they are entitled to, and that any such payments are made within appropriate timescales.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	11
Survey of placing authorities	NA
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	NO
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	03/03/05
Time of Inspection	9.30AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	75

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
This standard was not assessed at this inspection.		

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
A new managerial structure was in place. This had seen the creation of a dual managerial team – the service now having a Team Manager (Procedures) and an Acting Team Manager (Operations). Both the Team Manager (Procedures) and the Acting Team Manager (Operations) were suitably experienced and qualified to manage the service.		

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:

23

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

5

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

11

Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The management of the service had been re-structured since the last inspection – with the aim of ensuring a continuous improvement in the delivery of service to young people and foster carers. The new structure has seen the creation of a dual managerial team – the service now having a Team Manager (Procedures) and an Acting Team Manager (Operations). During inspection the managers demonstrated they had an appropriate working knowledge of the service's policies and procedures. They also displayed a sound grasp of the practicalities involved in the daily running of the service, and were aware of areas of practice that needed improvement. All staff employed received a job description approved by the Local Authority. During inspection staff interviewed appeared clear about

the managerial structure of the service, and lines of accountability. The inspectors were informed by a senior manager from the local authority that further reviews of the authority's children's services was ongoing, and further changes may occur within the foreseeable future.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspectors met with numerous foster carers during the inspection, both at group meetings and with individual foster carers in their own homes. The inspectors were impressed by the level of care offered by carers, and their commitment to the young people placed with them. In pre-inspection questionnaire's completed, young people were extremely positive in their views about the level of care they received in their foster placements.

The inspectors visited the homes of 6 foster carers during the inspection. The service had been proactive in responding to requirements made at the last inspection and foster carers were now subject to annual review of their approval status. Foster carers' accommodation and facilities were now part of the review process, and inspectors viewed health and safety reports and risk assessments that had been carried out during the review process. The Health and Safety Assessments had been signed and dated, but the risk assessments, although completed, had not been signed and dated. All foster carers interviewed stated they had received induction training and had gone through the "Choosing to Care" course before receiving placements.

Information provided by the service to inspectors showed that 31 new foster carers had been recruited since the last inspection. 62 foster carers had left the service during the same period.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors observed positive interactions between carers and young people. The Commission received completed pre-inspection questionnaires from 61 young people who were in foster care. The vast majority of young people were very positive in their views about their foster carers and the level of care they received. Young people interviewed were also very positive in their responses when asked about their current placements. Some young people detailed specific help and support they had received from their foster carers. Some young people questioned why they had to have annual medical checks as other young people did not have to have these.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Evidence of criteria for matching being appropriately used was evident in cases presented to Divisional Advisory Panels that were observed by the inspectors. The matching section of the Form F had been appropriately completed in all cases presented. However, out with these cases, in some files viewed by inspectors, there was little evidence recorded to show that appropriate matching processes and procedures had been followed when making placements. Foster carers interviewed stated that, generally, young people placed with them had never visited the home before coming to live there. Many carers stated that most placement discussions were conducted over the telephone – sometimes only a matter of hours before the placement commenced.

Files inspected contained little information about, or reference to, matching processes.

The Foster Care Agreements observed in files appeared to be generic documents that were not individualised to specific carers.

Several foster carers complained of receiving insufficient information on young people placed with them. Other foster carers highlighted instances of young people being placed with them, possibly in an emergency placement situation, and the information on the young person being received some time after placement commenced. However, a majority of foster carers stated that they received relevant information on young people placed with them.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Inspectors met with groups of foster carers in Barrow and Workington. All foster carers spoken to were aware of the Authority's policy on behaviour management. This policy was included in the Foster Care Agreements, and was also contained in the Procedures Handbook produced last year.

The Service Manager received notification of all allegations or complaints made against carers. Training for carers on this issue was covered in "Choosing to Care". However, during interview with inspectors, some foster carers were critical of the level of support available from the service to foster carers who were subjects of allegations made by young people placed with them.

During interviews foster carers displayed a clear, and appropriate, understanding of the action they should take, and procedures to follow, in the event of a Child Protection issue arising.

Foster Carers interviewed demonstrated their understanding about the issues of bullying. In questionnaires completed, and during interviews, young people did not raise bullying as an

issue of major concern.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

100

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Files viewed, and interviews with young people, evidenced that, where appropriate, young people were able to maintain suitable contact with family and friends. One young person interviewed detailed to inspectors the various contact arrangements made for her to maintain contact with her siblings, parents and grandparents. Most young people interviewed stated that, where they so wished, they were able to maintain contacts. Several foster carers spoken to stated they had supervised contact between young people and their families.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence that young people's opinions and views were sought. In the 61 completed questionnaires received from young people, the majority stated that their foster carers regularly sought their views and opinions on a range of matters and issues. A majority also stated they had been asked for their view on the foster carers they were placed with. However, a majority also stated they had never been asked their views on the Family Placement Service. All young people spoken to had attended their own reviews - some young people stated their reviews had been held in their foster carers homes. Some young people stated that they had chaired their own review meetings. Records of reviews were seen on the files examined. Some young people were critical of the lack of contact they had with their allocated social workers - an issue also raised by some foster carers. One foster carer stated a young person placed with them had returned from a meeting for young people in care quite upset by a comment made by a local authority representative that such meetings were "tokenism" and "did not really matter". This was raised with senior members of the service at feedback. However, in the main, the responses received from young people during inspection was that they were happy in their current placements and that they could talk over any issues with their foster carers.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Some carers cited instances of lack of adequate health information received when young people were first placed with them. However, the appointment of a LAC Nurse had greatly improved the delivery of health related care for young people in foster care. Files viewed contained signed and dated reports of annual health reviews carried out, areas needing addressing, a timescale for addressing these needs and who would be responsible for ensuring the necessary actions took place. Records of immunisations were also evident. The relevant sections of LAC documentation also contained relevant medical information. Details of medical and dental appointments were viewed in young people's personal files – it was the inspector's view the recording of these had significantly improved since the last inspection. Young people interviewed stated that if they had any medical or dental problems their foster carers arranged for them to have appropriate treatment.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Inspectors met with young people who were currently in foster placements with the service. The young people interviewed were all attending school or college on a full time basis. Some young people spoke openly about some of their experiences of school life and how they wished to continue their studies. One young person interviewed stated she had not attended school regularly at all until being placed at her current placement some two years ago – she now attended school regularly, and enjoyed going. It was a feature of the completed questionnaires received from young people that so many commented positively about their schooling and the help they received from their foster carers with homework. Foster carers interviewed showed a strong commitment to ensuring that the young people placed with them attended school and received a suitable education. Some stated they had attended school functions with, and on behalf of, young people placed with them.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Inspectors examined the files of all staff recruited since the last inspection. This evidenced that all staff had received appropriate Criminal Records Bureau disclosure certificates. However, the files viewed did not contain all the information and documentation required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations, 2002.

All relevant social work staff were appropriately qualified – an issue raised with inspectors at their visit in October 2004 re the equivalency of one staff member's qualifications had been satisfactorily settled.

The files of 8 foster carers were checked. This evidenced that all appropriate CRB checks, references and other checks had been carried out. The service had put systems in place, in conjunction with CAPITA's, to ensure that relevant personnel would be appropriately CRB checked every three years.

Total number of staff of the agency:

37

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

8

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Senior managers of the service highlighted the difficulties the service had, and continue to have, in recruiting and retaining suitable staff. They acknowledged there had been difficulties in recruiting staff and carers. Indeed the service manager stated in her pre-inspection questionnaire “the recruitment and retention of staff is the greatest challenge facing the service”. Foster carers referred to this in the questionnaires they completed – 33 of the 43 foster carers stating they felt that the service did not have enough staff. Recruitment of carers was an ongoing issue. Information provided by the service showed 31 new foster carers had been recruited since the last inspection – however, 62 foster carers had left the service in the same period.

With reference to the recruitment and retention of staff, the Family Placement Officers raised an issue regarding their pay and conditions – stating they were paid at a lower rate than other social workers working for the authority in Children’s Services. The service manager stated in pre-inspection documentation she completed that there were “serious attempts” being made to address this.

The service was constantly reviewing the processes designed to assist in the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The need to recruit more shared carers was being directly addressed - the service had set up a working party to address this issue. Plans such as a ring fenced advertising budget and improved payments to shared carers had been agreed. The appointment of Training and Support Officers in each division had proven to be a positive step in helping to provide, and ensure delivery of, further training and support for carers and staff.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

0

This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
This standard was not assessed at this inspection.		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
This standard was not assessed at this inspection.		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)		
The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>6 of the 43 carers who returned completed pre-inspection questionnaires stated they felt they did not receive enough support from the service. However, the majority of foster carers were satisfied with the support they received. During interview with the inspectors, foster carers were generally positive in their comments about the support they received from their Family Placement Officers. However, some foster carers raised concerns about the lack of support the young people placed with them received from placing social workers – citing cases where several months had passed between visits to the young people in placement by their social workers. Some foster carers spoke positively about the support group meetings they attended. However, several foster carers were critical of the “out of hours” support available, and some highlighted lack of appropriate assistance from Emergency Duty Teams, citing instances when, they felt, they had not received appropriate support or guidance. One carer stated that when she contacted an Emergency Duty Team at 11.15pm one evening, she was informed “they could not do anything till 9am tomorrow morning”. Some foster carers detailed how they had developed support systems between themselves – contacting other carers directly for support or assistance.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The inspectors viewed the files of 8 foster carers. This evidenced that the foster carers received regular supervision visits from their Family Placement Officers. Individual foster carers interviewed stated they received good support from Family Placement Officers – one foster carer stating that their Family Placement Officer was “always available” to them. One foster carer in the west of the county specifically stated to inspectors that they received “excellent support” from both their Family Placement Officer and Family Placement Team. Some foster carers interviewed did not readily regard all supervision visits as supervision sessions as such, but more as visits to check on how placements were progressing, and discuss any problems or issues arising.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

All foster carers interviewed had received induction training and had gone through the “Choosing to Care” courses before receiving any placements. More recently recruited foster carers stated they had received good training opportunities and good support throughout the approval process. The Training Support Officers were now well established in their roles. One such officer was allocated to each division. They had proven to be a valuable resource in assisting in the identifying of, and ensuring delivery of, appropriate training for foster carers. The service had carried out a Training Needs Analysis, and each foster carer had a Foster Carers Training Profile, which was held in their case files. However, some profiles observed in foster carers files had not been updated or completed. One foster carer stated they had asked for specific training several years ago and it had not been forthcoming. Training Support Officers detailed how there was varied attendances at training days and courses delivered – some were well attended, others were under subscribed and poorly attended. They stated it could be difficult to ensure some foster carers attended relevant training days. Many foster carers interviewed stated there was “far more training provided now than there used to be”. Foster carers stated they regularly received letters informing them what training had been organised, and when and where it would take place. Senior staff from the service informed inspectors that 70 foster carers had enrolled to study towards either B-TEC or NVQ qualifications.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The service had produced a new Procedures Handbook in July 2004. It contained a section on Children's Records, (Section 4.5). However, the section had not yet been fully developed and did not contain specific details on what required to be recorded. It was the Inspectors view case records and files had improved significantly since the last inspection – however there were still areas requiring improvement. The quality of information in children's files was generally of an acceptable standard, although there were some minor areas requiring improvement. The placement record sheet in foster carers files required to be amended to show why a young persons placement had ceased. Audit forms at the front of files highlighted deficits to be addressed – but had not been signed or dated to show when these deficits had been addressed. One young persons file viewed contained much information relevant to the young person's siblings and not relevant to the young person themselves. The format of the young people's files had improved significantly since the last inspection. The files viewed contained much more detailed information on education and health issues than files viewed at the last inspection. Generally, most carers stated they received sufficient information on young people placed with them, although a significant number stated they did not always receive appropriate information. Appropriate registers had now been established and met with the requirements of the regulations.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
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This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			417
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			231
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			124
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			31
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			62
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	124.67	Maximum £	656.51

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
This standard was not assessed at this inspection.		

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Several foster carers interviewed highlighted problems they had encountered in receiving appropriate payments due to them. Some felt they had not been appropriately advised on the payment structure and procedures during their induction training. During interview with the inspectors, Family Placement Officers referred to problems some of their carers had encountered in receiving payments due to them, and they were critical of CAPITA's role in this process. Some foster carers stated they were of the opinion that not all Family Placement Officers were fully aware of what payments foster carers may be entitled to. Other foster carers stated they had experienced problems in receiving payments for sessional and day work they had carried out. Others stated they encountered problems receiving payments for clothing grants. One foster carer stated they had not received payment for one young person until three months after the young person had been placed with them. Another foster carer felt it unfair that payments to carers stopped after 12 weeks if no young person had been placed with them throughout that period. One carer had been transporting a young person placed with them some 30 miles for contact visits on a regular basis, and was unaware she was entitled to claim expenses for this. Some carers stated the payment allowance sheet was difficult to understand – another carer stated a member of staff had attended a support group meeting and spent 20 minutes explaining the sheet and they had found this very helpful. Inspectors were informed that all carers were sent a copy Table 13, where fees and expenses were detailed, each April.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.**

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The service had responded to requirements made following the last inspection and Divisional Adoption and Fostering Panels were now constituted in accordance with the relevant standards and regulations of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The Inspectors observed two panels during the inspection – one in Kendal and one in Carlisle. The inspectors also observed a Resource Allocation Panel held at Workington. At the Divisional Allocation Panels, the chairperson ensured the meetings were well structured and all panel members had the opportunity to raise any points they wished, and to address questions to presenting case workers. The inspectors were of the opinion some representing case workers had not come adequately prepared for the panel meeting, and that some reports presented were not comprehensive enough, and, in some cases, the panel did not pursue some relevant issues rigorously enough.

Inspectors were provided with copies of reports presented to the panels. These reports varied in the amount of detailed information presented. Some reports did not appear to address all relevant issues. In one case, involving the placement of a two year old child, the case social worker had not interviewed the female applicants ex husband - despite the fact that the lady had been married to the man and had stayed with him until their son was aged three. The case social worker stated the reason they had not interviewed the ex husband was that it may have caused upset for the female applicant and her son. However, the service manager had stated in pre-inspection documentation that the service had acted on recommendations made in an official report, and stated “Many of the issues are also relevant to the assessment of foster carers, such as interviewing former partners and children who have been parented by the applicant. These have been incorporated into standard practice”.

The inspectors met with the chairperson of the panels after each panel meeting observed. They raised issues re quality of reports presented and, some issues arising from the reports that the panels had not addressed. The chairperson was in agreement with the inspectors on points raised. He also informed the inspectors that he regularly met with the Head of Children’s Services, who went over the business of the panel thoroughly with him. Indeed, at one panel observed, the chairperson reported back to panel members that the Head of Children’s Services had raised issues with him concerning one case presented – issues that the panel had not identified or addressed.

One of the functions of the panels was to approve changes to the number of children that may be cared for by carers. Pre-inspection documentation evidenced that only 5 carers throughout the county were over their approved allocation limit – and in all cases a sibling group were amongst the young people accommodated. The panels were now being presented with annual reviews on all foster carers registered with the service.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Pre-inspection information received showed that the service had 17 "Shared Carers". The service had also responded to the need to recruit more such carers, and a working party set up to address this issue. Plans, such as a ring fenced advertising budget and improved payments to such carers, had been agreed and were to be implemented.	
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Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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At the time of inspection the service had 63 "Family and Friends" Carers. The service ethos in relation to such carers was very appropriate. The service manager stated in pre-inspection documentation received that "Priority is given to placing children with family and friends as research indicates this has successful outcomes for children."	
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"Family and Friends" carers were assessed using the format in the specialist BAAF Form F. Their applications are discussed at Divisional Approval Panel in the same manner as other foster care applications.	
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D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Announced Inspection of Cumbria County Council Family Placement Scheme conducted on 03 – 31 March 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

We are working on the best way to include provider responses in the published report. In the meantime responses received are available on request.

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan (not applicable) within 28 days of receipt of this report, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I _____ of Cumbria County Council (Cumbria County Council Family Placement Scheme) confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the announced inspection conducted on 03 – 31 March 2005 and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of Cumbria County Council (Cumbria County Council Family Placement Scheme) am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the announced inspection conducted on 03 – 31 March 2005 for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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