



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Fostering Matters Ltd

**3 College Green
Gloucester
GL1 2LR**

Lead Inspector
Diana Waters

Announced Inspection
3rd October 2006 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	Fostering Matters Ltd
Address	3 College Green Gloucester GL1 2LR
Telephone number	07714 808185
Fax number	
Email address	fosteringmatters@btconnect.com
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (If applicable)	Fostering Matters Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Michael John Castledine
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 12th September 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Fostering Matters is an Independent Fostering Agency providing a family placement service for children and young people. The last inspection was in Sept 2005. Fostering Matters have a registered responsible individual and manager who are both social work qualified; they also employ a full time senior social worker and full time administrator. The service currently trains, assess, and support foster carers. The agency provides a 24hr on call support service to their carers and to local authorities seeking placements. The service reported having 37 children in 26 placements, including siblings. The agency covers a geographical area that has a radius not exceeding 1.5 - 2 hours travelling distance from the office base in Gloucester (with the exception of one carer). Children in placement came from 15 Local Authority areas.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection of this service took place in October 2006 over 3 days and was concluded in November 2006 with a visit to carers and young people and feedback to the service.

Two sets of carers and the four children and young people in placement were tracked and visited, the newest member of staff was interviewed and foster care panel was observed and minutes of past meetings scrutinised.

The service received praise from placing social workers, placing authorities and carers for their support of placements. However the administration and quality assurance functions need greater attention.

What the service does well:

The service does well at;

Providing experienced and qualified workers to support carers, liaise with and if necessary challenge placing social workers, they work hard to maintain children in placement

Support to carers was highly praised by carers, including the out of hours support.

Children in placement were familiar and comfortable with the workers from the fostering service and were reported to have frequent contact.

The service assess and approval suitable carers

All young people interviewed or who had completed questionnaires were positive about their carers

Payment to carers were reported to be prompt and trouble free

Follow on support, from carers and the personnel in the fostering service to young people who have left foster care and remained locally.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Carers recording, Supervision records on staff and carers, minutes of meetings and the organisation of children files have improved since the last inspection.

What they could do better:

The service could improve by;

Submitting monthly written reports to placing social workers on all young people placed

Ensure all young people have knowledge and access to children's guides

Provide detailed background information on young people to carers prior to placement, which includes medical histories

They should ensure that Foster Placement Agreements are completed on each child fostered in their current placement.

Ensure the social workers of children already in placement have been consulted before admitting additional young people, and young people in placement have their views on additional placements considered.

Encourage carers to take up post approval training.

Ensure that all carers have safe care policies on file.

Adhere to schedule 1 recruitment checks including telephone checks on references for staff

Complete independent membership of foster care panel .

Ensure Annual reviews are completed annually and placements for carers fit their approval status.

Improve minutes of the foster care Panel to be more comprehensive.

Consider support groups for carers

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12 The service supports the health and development of children and young people in placement and is judged good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

EVIDENCE:

Children and young people were registered with local doctors .One carer reported some difficulty in registering children with a dentist Carers reported arranging necessary medical intervention, and recording supported this assertion. A carer tracked had gone to some lengths to ascertain the implications of a particular diagnosis and confirmed assistance from the agency in support with this issue. Out of the 4 young people tracked 2 medical histories were not obtainable due to the specific nature of their placements. The remaining 2 files had limited background medical histories from the placing authorities. Carers confirmed they were able to access relevant health care services for the children placed.

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 On the whole ,the service makes suitable arrangements for the protection of children and young people. further improvements as detailed below would enhance the service. The service is judged adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

EVIDENCE:

Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau clearances are held on both the responsible individual and the manager and both have been satisfactorily fit person interviewed by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in July 2004 as part of the registration process. This process involves CSCI satisfactorily verifying Schedule 1 information.

Placing social workers confirm the service provides suitable carers and some have praised the quality of the carers and the support to them.

“I would support the view that this agency provide carers who have been assessed to provide an environment in which young people can prosper to very high standard”

Carers are assessed by qualified social workers using the BAAF F format and competency based format. This assessment is submitted to Foster Care Panel

to make recommendations about the carers suitability to foster by the director of Fostering Matters. Health and safety questionnaires are conducted as part of this assessment and include checking car safety.
All children seen had individual rooms that were comfortably furnished.

Out of the 4 young people seen 2 had been in placements for 4 years, The service turn down many inappropriate referrals and unsuitable placements, but they also work hard to maintain children in placements or provide alternatives within the agency wherever possible.

Placing social workers have both praised the efforts of the agency in their efforts to maintain children in their placements, and others have provided evidence that the interests of children already in placement had been compromised. Placing social workers have reported there was no consultation about the effect on the children already in placement, from the service or the placing authority, and there was no evidence of these discussions. Clearly in these cases there was a negative impact on the young people already in placement.

However, evidence existed that Fostering Matters endeavours to place young people with carers already known to them, if changes in placement are needed and one introduction to a long term placement was sensitively handled.

The agency has a comprehensive child protection policy and it is made clear that carers must not administer physical punishment.

Systems are in place to monitor and collate information on child abuse allegations.

Appropriate child protection training is reported to be provided during the pre-approval training for carers, but the agency needs to continue to ensure carers update training following their approval.

The inspectors recommended at the last two inspections that each foster home has a safe care policy for their household/ family prior to their approval and that this is then reviewed with each young person placed. Individual safe care policies were found on two files of young people tracked although they were brief; there was no evidence of these policies on the other two files.

Two placement agreements were on file which related to the previous or original carer, an additional one was not signed,

One carer interviewed had implemented safe caring strategies to protect all those living in the household and was very aware of the issues. These strategies and the extensive child protection experience of the support worker who liaised with police, protected young people from further distress about unsubstantiated allegations

Foster carers have reported that comprehensive information about young people placed is not always available at the point of placement. The service state they provide to carers the information that is available to them.

Placements were often made in an emergency with sparse information from the placing authorities, despite this some placements have been highly praised

by placing authorities and the employees of the service praised for offering excellent support to the carers, the placing authority and the young people.

The last social worker appointed, has the relevant qualifications, experience and knowledge to work with, safeguard and promote the welfare of young people and the inspector recognises the considerable child protection and management experience. The Recruitment process for this appointment was not strictly adhered to, the CRB was dated 22 days and two references were received after the start date. The service reports the induction period ensured that this employee did not have unsupervised access to young people during this time.

Additionally, the assessor that is used by the service had two references on file but neither was from the latest employer. Telephone checks on references for both posts were not evidenced.

Foster care panel was observed during this inspection and three sets of Panel minutes were scrutinized, from which the inspector can confirm the assessment process was followed. This process would be further enhanced by the assessing social workers attendance at panel. Panel was quorate with 5 members present on these occasions. Minutes taken of these meeting could be more detailed and comprehensive. Independent members of panel include representatives with education, medical, and an early years background. Panel have not had a member who has been placed with foster carers or whose child has been placed with carers. They are aware they need to replace the foster carer representative and ensure compliance for social worker representation. The R.I had been present for 3 of the 4 panels. A vice chair had been appointed and chaired the panel attended by the inspector. The chair of panel is a very experienced practitioner in both adoption and fostering.

The applicants praised the venue for panel.

The format for assessment was based on the BAAF F. Records of checks, references and written confirmation of visits to referees, were kept in a Panel file checked by Panel chair at the Panel.

The first Annual reviews were returned to Panel, some annual reviews were over due and as a consequence approval status on one carer tracked was incorrect and had not been varied by the panel decision maker.

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 The service is values diversity and promotes education and is judged to be good This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

EVIDENCE:

Carer interviewed showed sensitivity and awareness of the cultural needs of the young people in placement.

The service actively recruits carers from a wide range of backgrounds, which include: single, married and unmarried couples, same gender carers, and carers with a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Children and young people in placement were also representative of several ethnic and religious cultures and reported their cultural needs were respected and openly discussed with carers.

Young people interviewed confirmed they were able to pursue community activities and 3 of the 4 attended local schools. The fourth had been excluded from an out of county school prior to the summer holidays, in this case the placing and host authorities were in disagreement, consequently the young person had been without education.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10,11.The service actively promotes contact and makes an effort to consult with the young people in placement. The service is judged as good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

EVIDENCE:

Three of the four children tracked had limited contact with close relatives; two of the four had no potential for contact, although friends were actively welcomed into their foster home.

Both homes tracked were welcoming to the inspector.

Contact and the importance of appropriate contact are covered in carers' pre approval training and the understanding of the issue was evident from carers interviewed.

Children and young people seen and in questionnaires confirmed that the fostering agency social worker often see them in placement and the carers regularly ask their views. However, there is no evidence that the agency routinely consults young people about the general running of the service and there are currently no groups for fostered young people.

It was observed whilst on inspection, that the social workers in the agency were proactive in ensuring suitable contact took place, the arrangements made involved some complicated but well organised supervised contact . The worker in this case was seen to competently assess the risks and put parameters around the contact to minimise risks to the child, whilst promoting contact. Some placing authorities have commended the agency on their experience of handling difficult situations well and offering additional support and guidance to their social workers.

Young people in one home wrote in questionnaires and discussed with the inspector their concerns about not being listened to in respect of additional placements, this was further confirmed by placing social workers as reported earlier in this report , a strategy that is satisfactory to these young people is now in place.

The service have evidenced that carers are routinely provided with Young peoples written guides within the "box" of information provided by the agency, carers confirmed this, but not all young people had accessed them or knew of their existence, therefore they did not readily have the relevant information should they wish to raise concerns or complain. Therefore the recommendation is repeated, that all young people placed (of sufficient age and understanding) are given their own copy of the guide.

The young people interviewed spoke about their acceptance into their foster families and the outcomes for these young people appeared to be good, Quotes included "lovely, kind, supportive, wellcaring" "I can talk to my carers, live in a nice house and have a nice bedroom" All four children interviewed were positive about their carers.

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):

29 Payments were made to carers as agreed and specified by the agency. Carers and staff from the service provided support for young people moving on who remained in the locality. The service is judged to be good This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a written policy on payments to carers, which includes a clear breakdown of fees and allowances. It carefully defines the expectation of the agency in respect of the allowances for caring for young people, which is helpful without being prescriptive. The agency states that each carer will receive a yearly breakdown of payments received and carers are to be paid fortnightly, directly into their bank accounts. No concerns were raised by carers about payments and they commented favourably about the assistance available when damage from young people occurs.

Evidence also existed of the staff group and carers providing support for young people moving on who remained in the locality, they assisted young people and their placing authorities in locating independent accommodation, brokering tenancy agreements, helping with the physical move, acting as spare key holder, helping young people budget and maintaining an oversight of the young person and assisting with issues as they arise at the request of the young person and their placing authority. Carers also maintained a commitment and contact with these young people. The service is commended for this after care.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

17,21 and 24 The management of the service is judged to be good and could be further enhanced by quality assurance monitoring as detailed below. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency's social workers are experienced and qualified. The service has employed an additional full time senior social worker since the last inspection and has advertised for an additional social workers post. The service has also within the last year used an experienced fostering manager to assess some new carers. The service reports it supports training opportunities for staff. Whilst the agency has expanded within the last year and have appointed additional staff, placements have also increased, with predominantly emergency short-term referrals. It is the opinion of the inspector that whilst outcomes for children are generally good with an emphasis on the welfare of the child in placement and support to carers, some administrative tasks need further attention.

Supervision of the new member of staff was recorded monthly for the first three months and thereafter-bi monthly. Supervision of the administrator was held every 6 weeks and also recorded. Team meetings were reported to be held regularly and recorded.

The process for assessing carers' qualities, competencies and aptitude for fostering follow the recognised BAAF F format. For this inspection, the fostering panel was observed, and panel minutes read, from which the inspector can confirm that the assessment process was followed. This process would be further enhanced by the assessing social workers attendance at panel. Both applicants were present at the panel attended by the inspector.

Support to carers features highly in Responses to questionnaires by both carers and placing social workers, and the quality of the support has been highlighted by "working above and beyond what would be expected to successfully support carers and children in a very high profile case" The support worker is very competent and has been a crucial element in resolving issues satisfactorily in sometimes difficult situations"

All carers either in questionnaires or at interview have been very complimentary about Fostering Matters support, they are reassured that there is support 24 hours a day and commend the immediate service response from knowledgeable personnel," we feel confident in them, they have an approachable manner are friendly and accessible"," Five questionnaires returned confirm support is provided 24 hours, " this is important and we have used the on call service"," the whole team work well and each are approachable at any time of day or night, they have helped us through some very difficult placements and are very professional and knowledgeable","always some one to talk to day or night"," puts a buffer of common sense between us and social services policy"," they give good advice and training"." excellent

backup, small business and the carers know all the staff". " the workers are knowledgeable and friendly".

All carers have a named worker who regularly visits, supports and supervises them. The supervision notes seen on carers files were well ordered and adequate.

Training, support groups for carers and respite care are all areas that need development. First annual reviews were being returned to panel but some were overdue

There was mixed evidence of the agency working closely in partnership with the placing social workers, there were 3 returns from placing social workers stating the information received is excellent from which comments included. "I have good contact with the service and they are proactive about keeping me informed", "communication has been very good both verbally and in writing, especially in crises" 2 returns state the information is adequate with monthly reports being received and 2 returns state the information is inadequate stating "very few regular updating reports, no written reports for the LAC review meetings, no verbal communication until July 06 and no consultation about additional young people being placed, or reassurances there will be consultation.

Training for carers up to their approval is well established and each carer has to attend the pre-approval course. Ongoing training has been planned, although carers interviewed have not yet accessed further training in this last year. The service is aware that whilst training is provided the take up has been disappointing and needs to be addressed. Annual reviews are returning to Panel for their first Annual review and unannounced visits are part of this process.

Children's case records were well organised and easily navigable, the quality of the contents vary. All carers confirmed they kept diaries/ daily logs. The agency's statement of purpose requires a monthly report to forward to the placing authority, 3 social workers rate the service as excellent in providing information to the placing authority, 2 are adequate and 2 are inadequate reporting they had not regularly received the monthly reports. There was evidence from the agency of providing support and assistance to the carers in providing reports of an adequate quality and improving both their confidence and ability.

Some files also provided copies of letters and details of when reports were sent to placing social workers. the service is reminded to remain mindful of the notifications to CSCI as detailed in schedule 8. The inspector is aware of the

extensive child protection experience of all three social workers and the influence and knowledge they bring to the agency,
Some files contained the required LAC documentation from the placing authority, evidence from the agency requesting the missing information was not easily found ,the recommendation is therefore repeated that the agency introduces a system that keeps track of information requested and received and issues reminders where necessary.
Carers indicated that there was often little information on prospective placements, however the agency had introduced a form detailing the information given on referral from the placing authority which was routinely shared with carers considering the placement.

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	2
9	2
15	2
30	3

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

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

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

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

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	The Fostering Service Provider must ensure that all components of schedule 1 are fulfilled for staff employed by the service	31/12/06
2	FS1 FS11	4	The service must ensure that all young people have a copy of the children's guide	31/12/06
3	FS8	34(3)	A written placement agreement must be made with the foster carer for each child placed and relating to the child's current placement. as specified in schedule 6	04/10/06

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.	FS15	Telephone enquiries should be made and documented in addition to written references received as part of staff recruitment.
2	FS8	The agency should ensure that for each child placed, carers have a background history, and written foster

		placement agreement identifying any additional support needed.
3	FS9	The agency should ensure that each foster home has a safe care policy for their household and family prior to approval and that this is reviewed with each young person placed.
4.	FS23	The service should deliver a post approval training programme for both carers and staff, and further develop support networks amongst carers.
5.	FS24	The service should ensure case records kept on young people adhere to the agencies policies and should ensure that young peoples background histories, including medical histories are sought from placing authorities.
6.	FS11	Develop formal systems to ensure that the opinions and views of children are sought on all matters affecting them
7.	FS12	The service should ensure that young peoples background histories, including medical histories are sought from placing authorities.
8	FS21	The service should check the local authority requesting/making the placement has liaised with and obtained the consent of the placing social workers of children already in placement.
9	FS30	Foster Care Panel Minutes should be more detailed and comprehensive
10	FS21	Carers annual reviews should be held to time and variations of approval agreed by the panel decision maker.
11	FS25	The service should remain mindful of notifications to CSCI in accordance with Schedule 8.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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