



**Making Social Care
Better for People**

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Local Authority Fostering, Suffolk

**Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2BX**

Lead Inspector
Anna Rogers

Key Announced Inspection
26th June 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Local Authority Fostering, Suffolk
Address	Endeavour House 8 Russell Road Ipswich Suffolk IP1 2BX
Telephone number	01473 583000
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Suffolk County Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Hayley Phillips
Type of registration	Local Authority Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 17th October 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The fostering service comes under the umbrella of Children's Services of Suffolk Social Care Services. The Service Director Vulnerable Children directly supervises the Head of Fostering Services. The Head of Fostering Services is responsible for the fostering and link teams of which there are three distributed across the county. A new recruitment and assessment team has been developed since November 2005. A Team Manager manages each team on a day-to-day basis and are responsible for the supervision of their teams. The Head of Fostering Services supervises the four Team Managers and they meet together as a group.

SUMMARY

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

This was a key inspection, which focused on the key standards relating to fostering. The report has been written using accumulated evidence gathered prior to and during the inspection.

This inspection was undertaken over a nine-day period by two inspectors. The inspection included seeking the views of placing social workers, foster carers and foster children. Forty-three questionnaires were received from placing social workers, thirty-two questionnaires from foster carers, and thirty questionnaires from foster children. Feedback from questionnaires has, where appropriate, been included in the report.

The inspection included 9 individual visits to foster carers' homes which included a salaried carer, carers that provide short to long term care, kinship carers (family) and those that provide a respite service to children with disabilities (Link). During these visits, inspectors had the opportunity of talking with foster carers, and also with some of the children who had been placed.

Meetings held included the Head of Fostering, fostering social worker teams, social care fostering managers, trainers, the Looked After Children (LAC) Educational Support Services team (LACESS), three reviewing officers and the social care manager of the Montgomery Outreach Trust. A panel meeting was observed. The agenda included two new approvals, four de-registrations of foster carers and three annual reviews. One support meeting for foster carers was attended in the west of the county. An inspector also attended the Suffolk Foster Carers Association (FCA) meeting outside of the inspection programme.

What the service does well:

The work of foster carers is excellent. They should be commended for the investment they give to the fostering services and their willingness to "go that extra mile" for the child(ren) they are caring for. It was clear from discussions with foster carers that they provide a quality of life and opportunities to children and young people, which are often outside the financial allowances they receive.

Evidence from children's questionnaires and discussion with children in placement indicates that they feel "very much members of the family" and confirmed they are encouraged and supported in education and to become involved in activities of their choice within the financial constraints.

The LAC education support service (LACESS) team has now been in operation for approximately six months. There was evidence that their input has improved the educational attainment of children in foster care.

The LAC Health care team continues to provide an excellent service to young people. Promoting the health care needs of young people is seen as a high priority. A recommendation to include information about the LAC Health team in the Foster Carers Handbook has resulted in the health team being contacted directly by foster carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Assessment and Recruitment team are responsible for the recruitment of a wide range of carers, with a particular target of recruiting carers from ethnic minority groups. There is also recognition to recruit foster carers with particular skills to provide a positive and alternative choice to teenagers from other residential provision. New carers are assessed within a clear framework of competencies that identifies the level that needs to be achieved to care for more challenging young people.

Representation on the fostering panel provides a cross section of professionals and the community.

The service has clearly worked very hard to improve the system for systematically ensuring that all the recruitment checks are undertaken and evidenced in staff files. There are some minor amendments required as detailed in the next section of this report but generally there is an effective system in place. It is evident that having a dedicated member of Human Resources (HR) taking responsibility to ensure Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are received, references and other checks are received has greatly enhanced the process.

The details at the back of the 'Speak up' booklet about how children can contact The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) should be extended to include foster children.

What they could do better:

There was written evidence in files and discussion with foster carers that LAC reviews have a reasonable representation of the people involved. However there is anecdotal evidence from foster carers and inspection of LAC documentation that this is an area that could improve further. A minority of children and young people were not convinced that the consultation document they complete before a review is given credence, although some also felt the consultation booklet was repetitive and boring to complete.

Foster carers and foster children commented on the arrangements in place when foster carers are going on holidays abroad. While some of these decisions are made from a legal position instances were identified when foster carers want to take foster children with them rather than them having to go into respite care but finances are not available to support this.

Similarly school trips that have an educational development element that occur more often than three yearly are not currently funded for. It is recommended that such requests be looked at on an individual basis.

There was evidence that the local authority is using bed and breakfast provision for some sixteen year olds and also for those under sixteen who are in the LAC system. The recruitment and assessment team as noted are trying to fill the gap in resources to provide a positive alternative for young people some of whom have not had a positive family experience by recruiting more fee paid carers who have the skills to work with young people. The recruitment of people who would provide supported lodgings for older teenagers who want more autonomy should be considered in preference to bed and breakfast provision, which should only be used, in extreme situations for this age group.

As noted in the previous section the recruitment practice has greatly improved. However it is recommended that the interview checklist is dated and signed by the interviewers. The majority of the files inspected had a copy of the social workers qualifications but there were a few gaps.

The recruitment and assessment team should liaise with the training department to ensure there is a continuation of training rather than duplication for foster carers. Consideration should also be given to develop a training profile for each carer, which would enable the training department to develop training opportunities but also to target individuals who have not completed the whole course or do not regularly attend.

Foster carers who are subject to an allegation can be supported through an independent agency. However the role of foster carers who are mentors to less experienced foster carers should be further developed to provide support to foster carers who are subject to an allegation. Membership of support groups may also provide the additional support

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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

Young people's can expect their health care needs to be identified by the Looked After Children (LAC) health care team and addressed. However there may be a time deficit to access appointments from specialist services i.e. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence that children have had Connect support but there remains a concern by foster carers that Connect will only begin to engage with a child in 1:1 work with a child after they have been in a stable placement for a minimum of six months. Foster carers expressed concern that this stance could endanger a child's placement breaking down because there was none or little intervention.

There continues to be access for foster carers and social workers to have a consultation with a member of the CAMHS team to discuss concerns about a child in foster care but this was reported to be variable across the locality teams. Some foster children have received art therapy but carers commented about the need for the benefit of this intervention to be assessed. As noted at last year's inspection an art therapist did attend a support group to help foster carers understand and experiment with art materials that they could use in play with children.

It was noted at the last inspection that the Looked After Children (LAC) Health Team has a clear process for undertaking health care assessments on foster children. There was evidence during this inspection of health assessments and health reviews (undertaken by one of the specialist nurses from the LAC health team) available in children's files.

There is an expectation that social workers will complete the notification and consent form within 24 hours when a child enters the LAC system to enable the health team to prioritise and ensure every child/young person has a health care plan. It has been reported that there has been a slight improvement from last years 60% notifications by placing social workers but this needs further improvement.

There was evidence in children's files of health consent forms having been signed by either the child's parent or social worker. Immunisations had been completed for younger children.

Children and young people commented in questionnaires that they are given support and advice about being healthy. Comments included "I am encouraged to eat properly and take exercise", "I am told to eat lots of fruit and veg" "I am supported to eat properly and keep fit" and "my foster carer does not always let me have sweets"

Foster carers are offered health care related training including first aid, back awareness and manual handling, substance misuse, sexual health, HIV awareness, how to communicate effectively with young people in your care about sex and relationships and art therapy and its uses. (Further comment about the recording of attendance to training is made in the management section of this report)

There is list of attendees for each course but the database does not identify if a carer only attends part of a course and there is no foster carers profiles that enable the training department to target people who have not attended core training. There is a need to quality control sessions and attendance so they know when carers are receiving training particularly sessions relating to health and safety.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3,6,8,9,15,30

Children in foster care can expect to be supported by staff and foster carers who have been appropriately vetted and checks undertaken to confirm their suitability. Children can expect that they will be matched to appropriate foster carers who have been approved by the fostering panel.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering manager is scheduled to go on maternity leave in October (annual leave is being taken for last 2 weeks of September). The manager confirmed that an advert has gone out internally for a temporary manager to cover the post during their absence.

Since the last inspection a new assessment and recruitment team has been developed and this team are now responsible for the recruitment, assessment, enquiries and initial training of foster carers. There were some mixed views of the work undertaken by this team. The majority of fostering social work teams reported this as a positive move and felt it had created more time to undertake and complete reviews as well as providing support to foster carers.

The assessment team complete the Form F with prospective foster carers, and are responsible for ensuring all the necessary checks identified as part of the assessment process are completed.

Once the foster carers are approved by the fostering panel they are supported by a member of the fostering team in one of the three localities. To assist with the transition of the carers, fostering social workers undertake a second opinion visit prior to the assessment being presented at the panel. This process performs two functions, firstly they are reaffirming the assessment and secondly they are beginning to establish the working relationship with the foster carer.

Some fostering social workers felt that there could be better synchronisation of timescales between the assessment team and fostering social workers to ensure the assessment reports completed by the assessment team are received promptly by the fostering social workers. This would enable them time to calendar in appointments for undertaking the second opinion visits to foster carers in time for the presentation at the planned panel meeting. Fostering social workers felt this was particularly important should they have questions they want to discuss with the assessing social worker following their second opinion visit.

The new team have identified a target of forty new households to be recruited in this year. There is an awareness of a need to provide a choice of carers to meet the diverse needs of children requiring services. The team manager of the assessment and recruitment team is very experienced and has now recruited to all the vacant posts although one member is leaving. However some of the team do not have a fostering background and have needed to undertake training in assessments provided by British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).

As noted the locality fostering social workers are involved in the second opinion visits prior to the prospective foster carers being presented to panel for approval. In addition to reaffirming the assessment and establishing the working relationship with the foster carer and the fostering social workers it also provides an opportunity for the fostering social workers to begin exploring the potential of matching children to foster carers.

While the local authority is aware of the need when placing to consider the diverse needs of the foster child, there was evidence of children being placed outside their ethnicity. However there was anecdotal evidence of where this happened that this has been acknowledged and arrangements made for children to have opportunities to remain in contact with their cultural background, including a visit to family members in their country of origin to develop their cultural identity.

Safer caring information is provided in the foster carers manual. Foster carers spoken with reported that there had been a course provided on safer caring for male carers. One male carer who had attended had said that the course was good. However, one male foster carer highlighted the dilemma of having female foster children but not being able to care for them if the female carer

was absent overnight, yet being able to care for a male foster child in the same circumstances. The carers felt that this action is contrary to respecting diversity and assumptions being made that a male carer may abuse female foster children and not male foster children.

Placing social workers reported that they felt children placed in foster care are safe. Comments in questionnaires included "the child is kept safe and there is no evidence of abuse or neglect in any form" "I make regular visits and xxxx also has regular contact with their birth family and the foster carer shares all concerns and incidents" and "there have been times when xxxx has required greater supervision and the foster carer has been careful and balanced" and xxxx is very safe within this placement which offers safe and consistent guidance and boundaries but allows the children to safely push the boundaries appropriately"

A comment was made in a foster carer's questionnaire about the support network available during the investigation of an allegation by a foster child. From discussion with the fostering manager it is clear that because the fostering social worker for the carer needs to remain neutral during the investigation there are independent networks to support foster carers in these circumstances. However, it may also be helpful to explore the possibility of extending the foster carers mentoring role and/or support group in these circumstances.

Since the last inspection a new recording policy has been provided to all foster carers, which clearly explains the procedure for recording information and what happens to records when the foster child leaves the placement. One fostering social work team reported that there were concerns from foster carers in submitting records back to the authority after the child has left the placement, because foster carers are feeling vulnerable if an allegation has been made and the records are not available.

The notifications of allegations made against foster carers were discussed with the fostering manager. The records clearly demonstrate what action is taken following the outcome of the investigation to support foster carers, for example one couple were recommended to attend Unisafe training.

It was noted this year that inspectors received no negative comments from foster carers about the level of information they are provided with about the foster child at the time of placement.

There was clear evidence that the recruitment checks of staff working for the fostering service have continued to improve. One of the advantages is having a dedicated member of the Human Resources (HR) personnel team who monitors the files and ensures that the recruitment checks are all received and all relevant documentation is on the file.

The recruitment records of sixteen staff were viewed. The designated person had a very good system for ensuring that Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks came back to them. There was also evidence that they had followed up CRB's, which had a different signatory, and who were located in another locality office.

There was evidence of references being sent for and received and including the last employer. Good details of interviews were available, which included the scoring from the outcomes of the questions. However none of those seen had the name of the interviewer completing the form or the date of the interview.

There was evidence that interviews explored employment gaps. It was noted that on one application the applicant had disclosed that they had a disability/long term illness but did not specify what this was but disclosed on their personal details the nature of their disability and what they would need to support them. There was no evidence that this was explored during the interview, it was also noted on this file that there was no evidence that a health assessment had been undertaken.

A Safeguard Manager, who provides independence from the direct service, continues to be the chair for the two panels that meet on alternative weeks. A panel meeting was observed which looked at four de-registrations of foster carers, two new foster carers approvals and three foster carers annual reviews. The panel was well represented, with the exception of a representative from the Looked after Children Education Support Services (LACESS) team, who had called in advance to apologise for their absence.

It was noted at the last inspection that there were no representatives from ethnic minority groups. This deficit has now been rectified and on the day of the panel meeting an ethnic minority representative was attending the panel for the first time.

The panel was observed to be business like and focussed. All members of the panel were included in discussions before recommendations were made. The panel were observed to have looked at each of the assessments prior to the carer joining the panel and any additional questions to be presented to the prospective carers agreed.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7,13,31

Children and young people can expect their background to be considered when identifying placements and where this cannot be matched consideration given to exploring ways to ensure the young persons background is respected. Children and young people can expect to be supported to achieve their educational potential. Children and young people can expect to be supported to remain within their own family network where possible and appropriate.

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence that foster carers and link carers had taken an initiative to educate themselves about foster and link children's culture and diverse needs, for example one carer who had a child from Asia had explored what the expectations would be if the young person had lived in their country of origin in relation to contact with the opposite sex and freedom. One of the link workers highlighted the need to listen to the views of the parents of link children to ensure that placements meet their requests about the ethnicity of the link carer, which may be outside of their own ethnicity.

Inspectors met with foster carers who said that the present arrangement is for children to be funded to attend one school trip every three years and they felt that the child did not have equal access to opportunities as other children in the school.

The LACCESS team continue to develop in a positive way, with a representative attending panel meetings as often as possible. The team confirmed that they

attend young peoples reviews if invited and if appropriate. The team have recently obtained some administrative support through the care team and feel that communication is positive.

Most young peoples' records viewed included personal education plans, and a new central administrative post has been secured, commencing in September, who will take responsibility to ensure that Personal Education Plan (PEP) is in place for each child.

A feedback process has been created and is to be piloted this year. This quality assurance process will involve forwarding brief questionnaires to young people, carers, school staff and where appropriate, placing social workers to review any direct work undertaken by the team. The team reported that the impact of their work could be measured for example, last year there were eight exclusions from school recorded compared to one this year. Members of the team spoken with said they work alongside the school and carers to support school placements.

Bright Ideas, which consists of educational toys in a bag, continue to be available to foster carers. These are located in the three fostering service offices. Children at the age of five receive a book token and welcome packs to the library. A project titled "The Letterbox Club" linked to Key Stage 2 reading and numeracy was introduced during the last inspection. Each child is tested before they receive the educational parcels. They then receive six parcels (sent monthly), which contains stationary, library items, a reading book and an educational game. It was noted at this inspection children had been re-tested with all children showing significant improvement. Inspectors understand that the project is to be done again using a different cohort of children.

The LACCESS team have continued to provide computers to carers of young people. This was observed within foster and kinship carers' homes, where children were seen using the computer for homework. The letterbox activity continues to be successful and a study has been undertaken which shows how it has positively impacted on children's educational abilities.

There have been several consultation activities, which informs work to be undertaken by the team including meeting the requests of carers and promoting the work of the team through a planned conference and the foster carers association conference. One initiative planned is "an ambition raising" event to be held at Ipswich Football Club ground later in the year.

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

Children and young people can expect to be supported to maintain contact with family and to have their views and opinions listened to.

EVIDENCE:

Positive comments were received about the arrangements and level of contact arranged for children, however some fostering social workers expressed their concern that family support workers/agency workers collected some children they had not previously met.

There was evidence in children's files of detailed contact notes, which provided good descriptions of the visits. Children spoken with in foster homes said they were happy with the arrangements and that they felt they had been consulted where they wanted a change.

Foster carers spoken with and comments made in questionnaires indicate that foster carers see it as important to support foster children maintain contact with their families where appropriate. One foster carer described how they consult with the parent of the young person they care for including facilitating visits by taking the young person to meet their parent. Other foster carers said how important it was not to be critical of the birth parent if they failed to turn up for contact.

Inspectors noted that foster carers checked with children about whether they wished to speak with them and if they wanted to see the inspector in private. The majority of children and young people also commented in questionnaires that they were listened to by their foster carers and placing social workers.

Comments included " they discuss things with me when things go wrong and look at ways to make it right," "they ask me if I have any questions," "If I have done anything wrong they (foster carers) always listen to me and if I want to know something they always tell me", "my social worker said they would look into whether I could see my Dad and they did". Some children did comment in questionnaires that "I don't have a social worker at the moment" "they are always changing" and "I don't know them".

There was evidence in children's files that they do complete the consultation document prior to a review but the general consensus was that they were boring and repetitive.

Children and young people did indicate in the completed questionnaires that they knew how to raise concerns or complaints with the majority feeling comfortable to raise issues with their foster carers or social workers. No adverse comments were received about not being listened to.

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

Foster carers can expect to receive financial support in line with National agreements.

EVIDENCE:

The Head of Fostering has recently written to foster carers to confirm that the payments to foster carers are in line with the national agreement. The system in place continues to ensure foster carers receive their allowances and expenses. Foster carers felt that they were also provided with the necessary equipment to care for babies and children with disabilities. The Foster Carers Manual details how foster carers can access allowances and expenses.

As noted the fostering service has explored ways to extend the placement choice to older children. A new “payment for skills” model has been developed to increase the range of fee paid carers. Contract carers will continue to be supported but no new contract carers are to be recruited. The fostering manager has circulated to all foster carers how the new scheme will operate. The aim is to recruit 15 new fee paying placements this year.

Discussion with existing foster carers has highlighted their concern about how their skills of working with difficult children and young people are to be recognised. Some experienced foster carers have said, “Perhaps I should resign and then apply under the new scheme”.

The inspector raised this concern with the fostering manager who explained that the existing skills and experience will be recognised and explained that the letter sent to all foster carers does state “The funds for the scheme will provide around 15 new placements this year, and for every new carer recruited we have funds and a commitment to consider existing foster carers. The letter goes on to say, “If you think you may be interested in this scheme, you need

to start to talk to your Supervising Worker who will give you more details of the competencies and begin to explore your suitability with you.”

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

1,16,17,21, 23, 24,25,32

Foster children and foster carers can expect to receive a positive and supportive service by qualified staff who are trained and a service that is well managed, monitored and evaluated. Foster children can expect that records relating to their care are well documented and stored appropriately when the placement concludes.

EVIDENCE:

The service has a Statement of Purpose, which meets the regulations and is available. The fostering manager informed the inspectors that it was reviewed, updated and modified in June 2006 and scheduled to be revisited again in October 2006. There is a detailed Policy and Practice Manual. However from the copy provided it is clear that the content needs updating to reflect current practice within the service. Foster Carers are provided with a manual, which provides clear guidance about their role and responsibilities.

There is clear evidence from discussion with staff that they feel well supported by the team managers and confirmed that in addition to 1:1 supervision their managers also operate an open door policy. Assessment reports completed are seen by the manager prior to presentation at the fostering panel.

There are three fostering teams, located in Woodbridge, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich and managed by a social care manager. There have been shortages of fostering social workers, particularly in one team but inspectors were informed that the majority of vacancies have now been filled across the three teams.

As part of Suffolk's commitment to recruiting more foster carers to meet the diverse needs of children and young people a new recruitment and assessment team has been developed, and commenced its function in November 2005, but became fully operational in April 2006.

This team are involved with the Publicity and Marketing Manager in promoting the recruitment of new carers by attending and arranging functions in the community where they advertise the fostering service and encourage people to consider becoming foster carers.

Prospective carers can ring and receive an information pack, which details the process and inviting the interested parties to attend an information session. The fostering recruitment and assessment team are hoping to recruit an additional forty households during 2006-2007.

The route to the recruitment of foster carers follows a thorough assessment process using the standard BAAF Form F, and which comprehensively covers all aspects of checking, vetting and safeguarding against unsuitable persons being recruited. This in-depth process is carried out over a period of time (3 to 4 months), during which the suitability of foster carers is assessed by a qualified fostering social worker. This process also includes assessing the suitability of the foster care home, from a health and safety perspective.

A sample of assessments undertaken by the new team were seen during the inspection. Assessments are completed using the standard F form. From

inspection of foster carers' files there was evidence that the information that should be available as part of the assessment process was filed. The qualities, competencies and aptitudes as set down in standard 17.7 are covered during the assessment and includes caring for children, providing a safe and caring environment, to work as part of a team, own development and promoting attachment/work with children.

The link social workers continue to undertake their own assessments of carers willing to provide a respite service to children and young people with disabilities. From discussion with link social workers it is clear that they are involved in supporting the respite carers and those spoken with said the workers were "excellent", always willing to listen and keeping in regular contact. From discussion with link social workers there is a shortage of respite carers. They also support a "link plus" scheme for carers providing respite to children and young people with complex needs.

Inspectors received many positive comments about the level of support provided by the fostering social workers and link workers. The fostering social workers spoken with confirmed the importance they place on providing support to foster carers once a matching placement has been made. From discussion with foster carers it is evident that a good balance is being achieved that provides good support while enabling the foster carer to develop their own strategy for working with the foster child.

There is a lively Suffolk Foster Care Association (SFCA) whose membership includes a number of local authority foster carers who meet on a 6 weekly basis and work very hard to arrange an annual foster carers' conference. It was clear from discussion with the fostering manager that they consult with the (SFCA) on a range of topics relating to the practice of the service. For example they were involved in developing the new recording policy for foster carers and link carers and also supporting the implementation of the policy.

Some support groups have been established for a long time and are self supporting e.g. Waveney and Deben. An inspector attended a recently established group and observed that in addition to the carers "getting to know each other" they shared their personal experiences of caring.

Supervision visits are undertaken by fostering social worker/link worker and each session is recorded on a pre-printed format with suggested topics to be covered at each session. The foster carer signs the record and they are provided with a copy.

The Assessment and Recruitment Team undertake the initial training of foster carers. It was evident from attending the Assessment and Recruitment Team's team meeting that all of the team are involved in this process and are clear

about wanting to check with colleagues what works effectively and how they can ensure that prospective foster carers are fully engaged in the training sessions. However from discussion with the training section it is clear that there is some duplication of the training materials used by the assessment team and training provided once the foster carers are approved. There needs to be continuous partnership working between the training section and the Assessment and Recruitment Team, both of which are represented through the Training Commissioning Group.

The training section provides a range of courses throughout the year. From discussion with the training department it is clear that they have decided to publicise the annual programme rather than a quarterly programme in the hope that foster carers will be able to plan ahead. Generally foster carers were positive about the range of topics but comments about the content of the day were made with some feeling that having travelled quite a distance they would have liked more time spent on the training.

The trainers maintain a list of attendees for each course but the database does not identify if a carer only attends part of a course and there are no foster carers' profiles that enable the training department to target people who have not attended core training. There is a need to quality control sessions and attendance so the trainers know when carers are receiving training particularly sessions relating to core training and health and safety.

It was noted that foster carer/link carers are recording information relating to the foster child they are caring for in carbonated books. This is a positive development from the last inspection, which enables the top copy to be placed on the child's file and a copy to remain in the book. At the end of a placement the "book" should then be returned to the local office where the child's main file is stored.

The fostering social workers and link workers sign and date the individual record for each foster/link child placed that foster and link carers are required to keep.

The majority of carers were using a separate book or page for each child although there were one or two instances where the carer was writing about two children (who were related) on one page. This practice should be reviewed as it could cause additional work should one of the children, at a later stage, request access to their records.

A case file is maintained for each child in the care of the local authority. From the files seen it is clear that they have been monitored and were in the main well ordered, with an index for easy reference.

There was evidence of the Looked after Children (LAC) documentation on file and includes copies of reviews, which generally evidence that these are

arranged at six monthly intervals. It was noted at the last inspection that some reviews were taking place when there was minimal representation. While there was evidence at this inspection of this occurring foster carers reported this had improved. A group of reviewing officers were spoken with during this inspection and they confirmed that practice had been reviewed to ensure maximum representation at children's reviews.

The fostering manager is responsible for maintaining a record of complaints and of allegations of abuse, and these records was available for inspection. It was evident from discussion with the fostering manager that a clear procedure is in place to ensure that children are safeguarded when an allegation or serious complaint is received.

Kinship carers spoke positively about the support given by the fostering social workers. Where a worker is not available to visit a family arrangements are in place to ensure support is available should the carer require it. Some carers said they had been informed of their right to apply for a residence order or a special Guardianship order but those spoken with said they appreciated the support they received from the fostering social workers and were not sure if they would have this if they went for either order.

Records confirmed that the same considerations are given to Kinship carers as foster carers and there was evidence of discussion about contact between members of the family where appropriate. Training attendance by Kinship carers varied with some carers feeling they did not require training to care for a family member while others commented on the time and venue.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	4
6	4
8	3
9	3
15	4
30	3

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

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

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS13	16 (2) (b) (c)	Requests for participation on school trips must be assessed on an individual basis, based on the educational benefit to the child	31/10/06
2.	FS24	22(1)(2) 32(1) to (3)	The Fostering Service must ensure that the recording practice by foster carers meets with the local authority's access to records policy and procedure.	31/08/06
3.	FS6	33 (a)	The local authority must review the use of bed and breakfast provision for young people.	31/12/06

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.	FS7	Equality of vulnerability to abuse should be considered across genders when placing young people.

2.	FS7	The Local Authority should continue to review the recruitment process of foster carers, to ensure a wide range of foster carers to meet the diverse needs of children and young people.
3.	FS11	The details at the back of the 'Speak up' booklet about how children can contact The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) should be extended to include foster children.
4.	FS12	It is recommended that placing social workers should complete the Health Notification and Consent form to enable the LAC Health Team to prioritise and ensure every child/young person has a health care plan. Outstanding from last inspection.
5.	FS19	The assessment team and training section should work together to ensure that duplication of training does not occur.
6.	FS19	All training should be quality controlled, providing information, which session's carers received, and when.
7.	FS21	It is recommended that the Mentoring scheme by experienced foster carers for new foster carers should be developed.
8.	FS25	The final outcomes of investigations listed under Schedule 8 of The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 should be notified routinely to CSCI.

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