



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

West Sussex LA Fostering Service

**Social & Caring Services
County Hall
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 1QT**

Lead Inspector
Ms V Khan

Key Announced Inspection
31st 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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	West Sussex LA Fostering Service
Address	Social & Caring Services County Hall Chichester West Sussex PO19 1QT
Telephone number	01243 777100
Fax number	
Email address	ian.forbes@westsussex.gov.uk
Provider Web address	www.westsussex.gov.uk
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	West Sussex County Council
Name of manager	Ian Forbes
Type of registration	Local Authority Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration: None

Date of last inspection 21st February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

The local authority fostering service covers the whole of West Sussex and is split into three geographically based teams at Worthing, Bognor Regis and Horsham.

The service aims to achieve good outcomes for children, thereby maximising their life chances and choices. It sets out to achieve this by providing stable, safe and effective alternative care whilst balancing service costs against outcomes for children. The fostering service, along with the children's services responsibilities of the local authority is undergoing a programme of organisational restructuring and change.

The service benefits from a diverse workforce with a wealth of experience and skill, as well as an experienced and strong leadership team. It also benefits from collaborative working relationships with education and health colleagues.

The Annual Quality Assurance Assessment (AQAA) completed for the Commission identified that as at 31st March 2006 the service had 412 approved fostering households, offering 744 places for children. These include short term placements, permanent placements, kinship care, short break care for children with disabilities and special needs, placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, parent and child placements and remand foster care placements.

SUMMARY

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

Prior to the inspection a review was made of the contact between the service and the Commission For Social Care Inspection. This included an analysis of any notifications and correspondence that have been submitted.

As preparation for the inspection, a pre-inspection planning meeting was held with the service manager. The AQAA, the 2006 Annual Performance Assessment (APA) and the last inspection report were all read, with questionnaires sent out to 10% of foster carers and children in placement. A total of 11 completed questionnaires were returned to the CSCI by carers and 8 from foster children. A letter was sent requesting the views of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

County Hall was visited, where a selection of staff files were examined. Six foster carers files were read, three foster carers and their foster children were visited as part of the inspection.

The panel was not observed as part of this inspection, but minutes from the previous five panel meetings were read.

The service manager and the three team managers were individually interviewed and a selection of family placement social workers were interviewed at each office. The service manager and the achievement co-ordinator in the Support for Looked After Learners Service were interviewed. The inspector also met with the complaints manager, a training and development officer, the Looked After and Adopted Children (LAAC) team manager and representatives from the United Foster Carer's Association. The Right to Read project co-ordinator was spoken with over the telephone, as were two placing social workers.

Children's experiences of being fostered were positive with such comments about their carers as, 'They give me support', 'My carers help me to think about my future', and 'I feel safe and well cared for'.

The vast majority of carers who completed questionnaires or spoke with the inspector said that they were very happy fostering for the service, appreciated the training opportunities and valued the support provided by the supervising social workers. One carer commented on, '...the good levels of support for all and two way communication'. Another carer stated that the service provides a 'good standard of service and support', with workers being, 'child centred and professional'.

Four children's social workers returned questionnaires indicating satisfaction about their experiences of working with the service.

All views from children and young people, foster carers, staff, and professionals surveyed have been taken into account when undertaking the inspection and when compiling this inspection report.

This inspection was brought forward in time to meet the needs of the regulatory body, in preparation for the move to Ofsted. In spite of this, the agency's managers and staff co-operated fully to ensure that the inspector had all relevant information to assist the inspection process.

The service operates effectively and efficiently.

What the service does well:

The service is led by a dedicated manager who is committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in foster care.

Regular managers meetings and practitioner sessions are held which help to ensure consistency across the three teams. Supervision records of carers are well structured and cover all relevant areas. The fostering teams consist of experienced staff who provide a good level of supervision to foster carers. Staff are knowledgeable about recent developments in policy and legislation.

A comprehensive training and development programme is in place for carers. A large number of carers have obtained the Level 3 National Vocational Qualification.

The service recognises the importance of consulting with children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Relationships have been strengthened with education and health colleagues. The LAAC team is being further developed and specific criteria for referrals to LAAC and CAMHS is in place. A working party was set up to review personal health plans for children.

Strategies have been developed and are in use to demonstrate how children are matched with carers. A new referral form is in use, which assists with information sharing between the children's social workers and the fostering service.

The service has developed a policy and procedures on the use of physical intervention by carers. To accompany this, each carer is issued with a dedicated notepad in which to record all incidents, accidents and restraints. Team Teach Positive Handling Training is available for carers and staff.

The service is part of a BAAF project looking at the needs of children from ethnic backgrounds. The training department plans to introduce a new training course for carers from 2007, which will explore diversity issues.

Generally, annual reviews are being completed on time and auditing mechanisms are in place as a monitoring mechanism.

All managers have completed the training course, 'Licence to Recruit'. The staff files sampled by the inspector had the appropriate checks and qualifications in place.

What they could do better:

The service needs to develop systems to record and demonstrate the numbers of children and young people excluded from school. Personal education plans need to be in place for each child and young person of compulsory school age.

Carry out at least one unannounced visit per year to all carers.

The police checks and first aid training on two carers living abroad are overdue and need to be completed.

Ensure that CRB/POCA checks are completed on all prospective carers, even those who are 'transferring' from other agencies.

Ensure that any outstanding foster care agreements are returned from carers, with copies held on their files. Undertake a review of the foster carers register to ensure its accuracy.

Consider reviewing the policy prohibiting foster carers to progress through the accreditation levels unless there are vacancies, to ensure no carer is financially disadvantaged.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service aims to promote children's health and development.

EVIDENCE:

Children's case files read contained details of any identified health needs. Any special needs are noted on the placement referral form and specific arrangements are discussed and recorded at placement meetings. In the case of emergency placements, health information is made available to carers as soon as possible. Regular supervision of carers and the looked after children review process provide opportunities for any health needs of the children to be monitored.

Three foster carers were met and were knowledgeable about the needs of the children and young people placed and felt able to meet them. Carers understood the value of a healthy diet. Children are registered with local doctors, dentists, and opticians. Foster carers are expected to give full support and assist children to attend health appointments. Carers are required to notify the Service of any significant events, such as illnesses and accidents of children placed with them.

All children who returned questionnaires as part of the inspection confirmed that they received support and advice about being healthy. Comments included, ' We usually eat healthily, but on occasions we have special stuff' and 'I get advice from my school about eating healthily'.

Foundation courses in child protection and first aid need to be completed within two years of their approval. All carers are expected to renew their First Aid training every three years. As part of the inspection, it was noted that two carers living abroad needed to update their first aid training. Carers may attend a variety of courses, to enable them to promote the health and development of children and young people. These include, Personal Relationships and Sexual Health of Looked After Children and Young People, Understanding Autism, HIV and Hepatitis Awareness, and Promoting Mental Health in Looked After Children.

A dedicated LAAC (Looked After and Adopted Children) team is in place and receives referrals, which are made jointly by the family placement team social workers and the children's social workers. Work undertaken by the LAAC team includes working with attachment issues, placement planning, risk assessments, drop-in sessions for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and a consultation service to social workers and carers. The LAAC team has expanded since the last fostering inspection and the team works with children in short-term as well as long-term placements. The AQAA identified that 42 children were referred to the LAAC Team in the year to the 31st March 2006. All professionals spoken with during the inspection stated that the LAAC team worked well with the service to meet the needs of the children. The LAAC team has developed a ten-week course for foster carers, to 'help carers gain a deeper understanding of attachment theory and how it can be usefully applied in order to develop the skills needed for parenting traumatised children'.

It was not possible to meet with the looked after children's nurse during the inspection, but the fostering service manager confirmed that since the last inspection collaboration and integration with health professionals had been further strengthened. A working party consisting of representatives from Primary Care Trusts, CAMHS and Local Authority management had been set up to review personal health plans for children and the service is moving towards using the BAAF health assessments. The AQAA identified that at 31st March 2006, 73% of children in foster care received annual health checks in the previous twelve months. The 2006 Annual Performance Assessment (APA) identified that 'the health needs of looked after children continue to be met at a high level'.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

Children are generally well protected by the agency's policies, procedures and work practices. However, the service must ensure that full recruitment checks are completed on every occasion. The oversight whereby CRB/POCA checks were not completed on two carers who 'transferred' from another local authority as well as failing to complete police checks on carers living abroad could put children at risk.

The service manager and staff in the fostering service are suitably experienced and committed to their work.

Appropriate matching of children to carers helps to ensure children are safeguarded.

Carers are committed to the welfare of the young people in their care.

The fostering panel is rigorous and challenging, which ensures that approvals and reviews are carefully scrutinised.

EVIDENCE:

Discussion with carers and records of placement visits showed that relationships with supervising social workers are good. Regular six weekly supervisory visits are taking place to mainstream foster carers, with more frequent support visits undertaken as necessary. Feedback from carers was very positive with regards to the support and advice available from staff in the fostering service.

The agency has an appropriate and clear written procedure for use if a foster child goes missing.

The process of matching is undertaken with care through discussion and information sharing amongst family placement social workers and other professionals. Since the last inspection, the fostering service has introduced a new referral form and matching record, which is being used to demonstrate and strengthen the matching process for children placed with carers. Children and young people visited as part of the inspection were found to be in appropriately well-matched placements. If at all possible, children are introduced to their prospective foster families before moving in. Some placements with independent fostering agencies are purchased to ensure appropriate matching is undertaken.

The AQAA identified that in the twelve months to 31st March 2006, a total of 11 allegations were made against foster carers, all of which resulted in child protection investigations. Six of these resulted in disciplinary action against carers, but no referrals were made under the Protection of Children Act 1999.

The West Sussex Child Protection Procedures apply to the service and these comprehensive folders are issued to each foster carer upon approval. New Sussex Child Protection Procedures have been developed and are awaiting distribution/publication. All foster carers receive training in child protection as part of their preparation training and all carers must complete a further foundation course in child protection within two years of approval. Carers may also revisit this course at any time as a refresher. Child protection and safe caring is inherent in all training that is provided by the service.

Two carers did not have CRB/POCA checks completed as part of their 'transfer' from another local authority. The service must ensure that all carers have CRB/POCA checks undertaken as part of the assessment and approval process. CRB checks should routinely be undertaken at three yearly intervals, and for carers living abroad, police checks should be completed in their country of residence. The inspector learned that a new database was being established to identify any CRB checks that were coming up for renewal four months before the deadline, to ensure checks on all existing staff and carers are renewed on time.

There are clear guidelines provided to carers, which make it clear that corporal punishment in all forms is unacceptable. It was evident from talking to carers and the returned questionnaires that carers were clear about the fostering service's expectations on discipline. No restraints have been recorded in the twelve months to 31st March 2006. The service has put in place a comprehensive policy and procedures regarding restraint, with carers being issued with duplicating notepads on which to record any restraints. These forms are monitored by the family placement social workers. The handbook has clear guidance on behaviour management issues and provides suggestions regarding managing difficult behaviour. Team Teach Positive Handling Training is provided as a two-day course, which enables carers to develop diversion and de-escalation techniques as well as to develop appropriate strategies and personal safety responses.

The AQAA noted that 13 complaints were received by the service in the 12 months to the 31st March 2006. Systems are in place to record and monitor complaints and child protection issues. Each team manager holds these details and the service manager takes an overview of such matters.

Staff working in the fostering service are experienced, with the necessary skills and knowledge required. All managers have extensive experience and qualifications and the organisation of the service ensures that it is rigorously monitored. All family placement social workers are qualified, experienced and registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). They demonstrated during the inspection an in-depth knowledge of the cases they were managing. A selection of recruitment records were examined at the human resources department of the local authority. All files read contained evidence of satisfactory references, qualifications, GSCC registration, Criminal Records Bureau checks and application forms. All social workers are expected to undertake the post qualifying childcare award and to undertake ongoing training courses as evidence of professional development.

Three panels are held across the county, which look at assessments of prospective carers, the first, and third annual reviews of carers and also any conduct issues. As an inspector observed a fostering panel as part of the last fostering inspection, this was not duplicated on this occasion. The panel clerk assisted the inspector and minutes of the last five panels were read. The

minutes evidenced robust and efficient management and operation of all panels.

The assessment process of carers includes a health and safety checklist. Health and safety is also covered in the initial preparation training, ongoing supervision sessions and at annual reviews. Foster carers provide safe, healthy and nurturing homes for children and young people. The foster carer's handbook contains useful guidance on health and safety matters.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

7, 13, 31

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children are provided with services which value diversity.

The fostering service encourages foster carers to provide children and young people with a range of experiences to enable them to make positive, informed choices.

The service recognises the importance of educational achievement.

Flexible packages are provided for children and families using the short-break scheme.

EVIDENCE:

The service provides a range of foster carers to meet the needs of young people. A foster carer recruitment strategy policy outlines the local authority's proposals for recruiting carers. When undertaking matching, the service takes into account the child's needs, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Issues of diversity are included in carers' preparation training and a carers are expected to attend a course looking at identity, within 2 years of approval. A course is run specifically for male carers, which

explores equality, as well as evaluating risk and the need to develop safe caring plans. The service plans to introduce a training course, looking at diversity and meeting the needs of children from other ethnic backgrounds from 2007.

The Support For Looked After Learner's Service (S4LAL) consists of a service manager, an achievement co-ordinator, an attendance co-ordinator and an educational psychologist. The service manager and the achievement co-ordinator were interviewed during the inspection and showed commitment and dedication to looked after children and young people. The S4LAL supports 'access to full-time educational placements and to raise the achievement for all looked after children'. The service is being further developed to include a personal education plan co-ordinator, a project manager and three inclusion support workers. The 2006 APA noted that 'the council has developed a strategy and identified priorities to address the educational underachievement of looked after children. There has been some improvement, however not enough of these pupils have their own personal education plans'. The inspector was informed that new personal education plans had been developed and will be launched in December 2006. The service was not able to demonstrate numbers of children excluded from school, but the introduction of a new database from 2007 should enable this data to be recorded and evidenced.

When undertaking the matching process, the agency takes into account the children's schooling and wherever possible, children are enabled to remain at their original schools. Some carers travel outside their areas to enable foster children to continue their education at their original schools. The service runs a training course entitled 'Education Protects' for carers, which addresses 'how carers can "do as a good parent would do" in the education of children in their care'. Carers confirmed that they have close links with the young people's teachers, and were expected to attend school events. All feedback received from placing social workers indicated that the carers' support for education was good. Children surveyed during the inspection confirmed that they received help in order to be successful in their education. Carers surveyed all said that the service provided excellent support in helping the children they care for achieve educationally.

Carers are encouraged to support their foster children to participate in activities in their local communities. The service is keen to ensure that children are given access to opportunities to develop and pursue new experiences and talents. The children and young people who were case-tracked as part of the inspection were noted to have their diverse needs being met and they were being supported to develop hobbies. The inspector spoke with the Right to Read project co-ordinator, who attends support groups, arranges literary events and runs activity/discussion sessions in local libraries for children and carers. Two carer's questionnaires noted that this was an excellent way of encouraging children to enjoy books.

An annual awards ceremony is held to celebrate the success and outstanding achievements of looked after children and young people. Carers and staff spoke highly of the October 2006 event at Butlins in Bognor Regis, which combined prize giving and entertainment.

Young people with disabilities are linked to one foster carer or family who provide a regular pattern of planned short break care. There is a dedicated team who support and co-ordinate this area of work. A visit made during the inspection to one particular foster carer, highlighted dedication to meeting the needs of the complex needs of the children in placement.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

10, 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Contact arrangements are detailed in young people's case files and supported by their carers wherever possible.

The fostering service is committed to ensuring children are consulted about matters which affect their day-to-day lives.

EVIDENCE:

Children are likely to have issues regarding contact discussed prior to becoming admitted to care, and also reviewed as part of the statutory review process. Some care plans will have restrictions upon contact. Should carers need to transport children to contact meetings, the service reimburses their expenses. Carers spoken to during the inspection stated that they were not expected to supervise any contact arrangements, and that this was arranged by the child's social worker. The service is aware that placements for looked after children need to be within a 20 mile radius of the child's home whenever possible in order to maintain links with family and friends.

The importance of contact is discussed in preparation training, guidance on contact is in the handbook and all carers are expected to attend a specific training course on this subject within 2 years of approval. This course enables carers to have knowledge of the legislative framework regarding contact and

consider the impact of contact issues on the children, the foster family and the birth family.

Children are consulted about contact and they are able to access an advocacy service and independent visitor scheme. The advocacy service is run by PAR (Participation, Advocacy and Rights Office of the Children's Society). The participation worker was met during the inspection and explained how PAR was working to get looked after children become more involved in their care. PAR together with a selection of looked after young people, produces a 'Rant and Rave' magazine twice a year, which is given to all looked after children. Young people attend prospective carer's preparation training, by doing a short presentation about communicating with young people.

The Independent Reviewing Officers were not spoken with during this inspection, but at the last inspection it was noted that the fostering service promoted the engagement, consultation and participation of looked after children. All young people are consulted about their care at the time of their looked after child statutory reviews and their views are sought as part of their carers' annual reviews.

Life story work is undertaken with some children to help them to make sense of their history and situation. Two questionnaires from children confirmed that they were involved in life story work with their carers.

The agency meets with the children of prospective carers as part of the assessment process, to seek their views, which are incorporated into the fostering assessments. Workshop and activity days are held during every school holiday for the sons and daughters of foster carers. These days enable them to have their voices heard, at the same time as participating in fun activities with other children who foster.

Children are provided with opportunities to speak with the family placement workers when they visit. All questionnaires returned by children as part of this inspection confirmed that their carers listened and took notice of their opinions. Additionally, all children knew who to speak to if they were not happy, had a problem or wanted to make a complaint. Helpline numbers are provided on booklets which are given to children, including the PAR project, West Sussex Social Services and the phone number and e-mail address of the children's complaint's officer. The complaints manager stated that new leaflets were shortly going to be issued to all children, advising them of the free-phone telephone number which they are able to use in order to raise any concerns or to make a complaint. Carers who returned questionnaires rated the service as good at involving the children in decisions about their day-to-day lives. One carer commented, 'All important decisions have been discussed with our young person so she is involved in every aspect of her life'.

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

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Carers are paid an agreed allowance according to skill, experience and ability.

EVIDENCE:

The payment scheme for carers consists of an all-inclusive allowance, which covers the cost of caring for the child, according to the age of the child. The second element is the household fee, which is the reward element paid to carers linked into the level of accreditation reached by the primary carer in the household. The all-inclusive allowance is intended to cover all expenses by having a child in the home. This includes pocket money, transport costs, money for school uniform and trips and clothing. The rate of this allowance depends on the age of the child, with older children attracting a higher allowance. Payments range from £146.44 per week for 0-3 year old children to £224.56 per week for 16-18 year old young people. Payments for overnight stays are made up of the all-inclusive allowance, the household fee and the disturbance allowance. The disturbance allowance ranges from £20.92 for very young children and babies, to £32.08 per night for 16-18 year olds. The household fee is made for each household, regardless of the number of children in placement, and recognises the skill level attained by the carer. The household fees per week are as follows: Level 1 is £68.95, Level 2 is £ 97.65, Level 3 is £195.23 and level 4 is £287.14. Some carers are paid retainers if they have achieved level 3 or 4 whereby they will continue to receive the household fee for a period of time despite having no child in placement. The inspector learned that five level 3 carers are awaiting accreditation and

payment at the appropriate level, due to restricted finances. It is recommended that this policy and practice be reviewed.

Carers are given guidelines as to suggested weekly pocket money allowances. These range from £1.20 for 0-3 year olds to £11.80 for 16-18 year olds.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

1, 2, 5, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 32

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service manager is a dedicated, skilled and professional manager, who demonstrates excellent leadership skills.

The staff team employed in the service are experienced and committed to their roles.

Foster carers are provided with good levels of support and excellent training opportunities. Unannounced visits to carers who look after children with disabilities on the short-break schemes need to be undertaken. This has not, however, impacted upon meeting the children's needs.

Overall case records are up to date. Some lapses in placing social workers not providing statutory looked after child documentation and the service not chasing up outstanding foster care agreements could impact upon carers' ability to provide the care required. It is hoped that with the implementation of a new database in 2007, information sharing will be strengthened.

Family and friends carers are able to access guidance, support and training.

EVIDENCE:

The service has an accurate statement of purpose in place which sets out the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The statement of purpose is regularly reviewed and updated. Children and young people are given children's guides, which provide them with all the required information, including how to contact an advocate and how to complain. The service provides children and young people with the BAAF guide for children and young people entitled, 'Fostering. What it is and what it means'. The guide sets out how to raise any concerns, complaints or issues and includes a list of helpline numbers: Childline, NSPCC and Who Cares? The fostering service has produced a new children's guide entitled, 'Welcome to Care', which was developed in consultation with some looked after children and young people who are involved with PAR. The service also issues children with booklets entitled, 'Welcome to your new Foster Home!' which they can complete by adding details of the foster family, pets, social worker, school information, arrangements to see family and friends, meals, bedtimes and home-times, rules of the house, money matters, clubs and activities.

The workloads of family placement social workers alters according to the worker's skill, expertise, experience and knowledge, as well as hours worked. Regular staff supervision enables workers to discuss any issues and concerns and allows for workloads to be kept under review. A supervision contract is in place for all social work staff members, although carers files sampled indicated that this is not consistently being put in place for all carers. All staff are able to access in-house training courses, are encouraged to complete their post-qualifying Child Care Award and are able to apply for external courses that are relevant to their roles. All staff spoken with during the inspection demonstrated excellent knowledge of the October 2006 Department for Education and Skills publication, 'Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care'. Regular team and whole service meetings are held, with manager's meetings held fortnightly, to ensure consistency across the County. Communication between the foster carers, the service manager, the team managers and the family placement social workers is good.

One carer commented that 'our family placement social worker wants the best ... so as a team we all work together to achieve this'. Retention of staff in the three teams is good and workers spoken with indicated a high level of job satisfaction.

The service uses the BAAF Form F assessment on carers. Members of the family placement teams undertake most assessments on prospective 'mainstream' carers. Assessments on prospective kinship carers are usually completed by sessional social workers, who are supervised by a dedicated kinship care family placement worker. Assessments on prospective foster carers wishing to specialise in remand foster care are undertaken by a specialist worker from the youth offending team. The fostering service expects the family placement team members to undertake any assessments on carers who are going to care children placed for permanence. The assessment process for all types of carer covers all areas listed in standard 17. The completed assessments are presented at panel, where carers attend with assessing social workers. Minutes read from the previous five panels evidenced that the panel provides clear scrutiny of the assessment process.

Each foster carer is a member of Fostering Network, providing support, free legal advice and a legal expenses insurance scheme. The United Foster Care Association provides a 24-hour advice service to carers, which is in addition to the generic Social and Caring Services emergency duty service. The Association is involved in delivering the first aid training to carers and a newsletter is produced on a quarterly basis. All carers have been issued with fridge magnets, which provide the contact details of the Association. The Association facilitates holiday schemes for foster children during each school holiday. Examples include trips out, barbeques and Christmas parties. The inspector attended a United Foster Care Association meeting as part of the inspection. members praised the service manager as being 'open and transparent'.

The inspector met with the training and development officer with the lead for foster carer training. Courses are listed on the website and carers are issued with annual brochures, providing details of training courses. The training calendar is developed in partnership with the training department, the United Foster Carers Association and the fostering service. All staff and carers who are involved in delivering training courses have attended the 'Training the Trainers' course. Carers are involved in delivering a good selection of training to other foster carers. Course attendees may claim travel costs, receipted childcare expenses and a lunch allowance where appropriate. All carers surveyed confirmed that training opportunities were excellent. Comments included, 'Lots of training...' , 'Training and NVQ opportunities are good', and 'Training is excellent'. Details of training attended is reviewed as part of the carers annual review process.

West Sussex County Council offers a development pathway, which provides structured training and career development for all approved carers. Most carers are appointed to Level 1 after their approval. There are six foundation courses at this Level, including the mandatory First Aid Course. Foster carers are required to complete all Level 1 courses within 2 years of approval. Once completed, carers may apply to the County Fostering Accreditation Panel to be appointed to Level 2. Once appointed to Level 2, there are four mandatory courses which need to be completed within 2 years of being appointed to level 2. Once completed, carers may apply to the County Accreditation Panel to be appointed to level 3. Any carer wishing to progress through to Level 3 must undertake and be awarded the NVQ Caring For Children and Young People. The Annual Quality performance Assessment identified that as at 31st March 2006, 100 carers had obtained the NVQ Level 3 qualification. The carer holding the NVQ 3 must also undertake In Touch with Children training course within 18 months of attaining level 3. The County Accreditation Panel assesses carers wishing to remain at Level 3 every three years, on evidence of work produced that meets the standard and performance criteria at this level. To move on to Level 4, carers must complete an in-depth study on a specialist area, complete a piece of work on three examples of practice and undertake a substantial course in childcare, or the equivalent of five short courses. The County Accreditation Panel assesses carers at level 4 every three years, on evidence of work produced that meets the standard and performance criteria at this level. 'Moving on to a higher level depends on evidence of knowledge, skills and attitudes, completed training, the carer's last annual review, resolution of any concerns, complaints and investigations to the satisfaction of West Sussex County Council, comments written by the carer's family placement social worker and their team manager and an available vacancy at the level applied for'. The inspector noted that five carers were awaiting 'promotion' to a higher level, but were on a waiting list, due to pressures of resources. It is recommended that a review of this policy and practice be undertaken. The service considers applications to consider accreditation of prior experiential learning on a quarterly basis. The process is clearly set out in the training

guide. The training and development officer stated that the service is considering alternatives to the traditional group training settings, for example one-to-one sessions and on-line courses. In the last twelve months no training courses have been withdrawn, rather that new training courses have been developed.

The fostering service provides a good level of support to carers. Examples of this were discussed with family placement social workers, children's social workers and carers. Support is tailored to suit the needs of the individual family and situation. Carers who returned questionnaires and who met with the inspector were very positive about the service and the support that they received. Comments included: '...being there for us if and when needed', 'family placement social workers, regular training, respite available and school holiday activities are all good forms of support' and 'help always at hand'. One carer described feeling proud to foster for West Sussex County Council. Support groups are held throughout the County for carers. It is recommended that details of all support groups are displayed on the website, rather than just the Chichester group. Workers in the disability team stated that unannounced visits are not undertaken carers looking after children for short breaks. The service is reminded that occasional unannounced visits, at least once per year are made to all carers. Retention of carers is encouraged by the provision of support and training. Any specific requests for respite are considered on an individual basis.

The complaints manager was met and any complaints relating to the fostering service were discussed. The complaints manager had excellent knowledge of the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. All complaints are taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.

The foster care handbook is a comprehensive resource for foster carers. All policies and procedures are also available over the website for ease of access.

Discussion with all three team managers and the service manager, as well as with carers and staff, and reading a selection of carers' files indicated that generally annual reviews are being completed on time. The family placement service uses colour coded files; one for assessment information, a second one for ongoing support and information, and a third one for the child in placement. Placing social workers hold the primary files relating to children in placement. Copies of court orders giving permission for four children to live abroad were seen. At the last inspection, a requirement was made to audit children's case files in the fostering service to ensure the appropriate information is held. Of the files read during the inspection, there was no evidence that this had been undertaken, but the files were generally in order. One team manager confirmed that 'spot checks' are carried out on all files. Another team manager said that 'files are regularly looked through'. As previously noted in this report, children's care plans and review documentation were not routinely on the files. The Integrated Children's System is being implemented in January 2007 and it is expected that this will improve information sharing between social workers and the family placement teams.

Carers' files sampled were inconsistent regarding storing copies of foster care agreements and foster placement agreements. Some foster care agreements had not been signed and returned to the service by carers and this was also evidenced as being outstanding by looking at the tracking system. It is recommended that the service obtains the outstanding documents. The inspector noted that an entry had been made twice on the foster carer's register and this was brought to the attention of the service manager. It is recommended that the register be reviewed and amended as necessary, to ensure its accuracy.

Carers are expected to make regular recordings about the children they are caring for. These records are checked by the family placement social workers, when they undertake supervision with carers.

The service has been notifying CSCI of events and notifications, as per Schedule 8 and Regulation 43 (1) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. It is recommended that these notifications be anonymised, so as to comply with the CSCI file management policy.

The service has a suitably qualified and experienced service manager and team managers. All staff spoken to during the inspection were highly satisfied with the support they received from their managers. There is a clear management structure in place and the person to whom each staff member is accountable is clearly identified. Areas of work are delegated appropriately and the lines of accountability are clear.

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	4
6	3
8	4
9	2
15	4
30	4

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	2
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

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	4
4	X
5	4
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	4
20	4
21	4
22	2
23	4
24	2
25	2
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	3

b

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.	FS9	27	Ensure CRB/POCA checks are undertaken as part of the process of carers transferring from other agencies. Ensure police checks are undertaken on foster carers living abroad at three yearly intervals.	31/01/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS25	Ensure that all Schedule 8 events and notifications made to the CSCI are anonymised. Undertake a review of foster care agreements to ensure that any outstanding documents are obtained, with copies held on carers' files. Review the foster carer's register to ensure its accuracy.

2.	FS22	Carry out at least one unannounced visit per year to all carers. Issue a supervision contract to all foster carers.
3.	FS12	Ensure all carers living abroad update their first aid training every three years.
4.	FS13	Develop systems to record/demonstrate the numbers of foster children excluded from school. Ensure personal education plans are completed for all children of compulsory school age.
5.	FS21	Publicise details of all carers support groups on the website.
6.	FS23	The policy and practice prohibiting foster carers to progress through the accreditation levels unless there are vacancies should be reviewed.
7.	FS24	Liaise with placing social workers to obtain statutory looked after child documentation and provide copies to foster carers.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Hampshire Office
4th Floor Overline House
Blechynden Terrace
Southampton
SO15 1GW

National Enquiry Line

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI