



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Next Step Fostering Services**

**Wrens Hill House  
Rushett Lane  
Norton  
Faversham  
Kent  
ME13 0SH**

*Lead Inspector*  
Alex Turner

*Announced Inspection*  
20th February 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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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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](http://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](http://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** Next Step Fostering Services

**Address** Wrens Hill House  
Rushett Lane  
Norton  
Faversham  
Kent  
ME13 0SH

**Telephone number** 01795 521739

**Fax number** 01795 522707

**Email address** info@nextstepfostering.org

**Provider Web address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Next Step Fostering Services

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)** Ms Lesley Ann Ward

**Type of registration** Fostering Agencies

**Category(ies) of registration, with number of places**

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      29th March 2005

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

Next Step Fostering Services provides foster care for looked after children and young people, aged 0-18 for assessment, support and respite, as well as short, medium, and long term care for children where it is not possible for them to return home. Next Step also provide parent and child placements offering support, supervision and assessments within public court proceedings. There is a day-to-day activity programme for children temporarily outside of mainstream education. At the time of this inspection Next Step were supporting and working with 47 children and 35 full time and 2 respite foster carers.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspection was conducted over five days by one inspector and included evening visits to four carer's homes. Key inspection standards as identified in this report, were the focus of the inspection. Children and carers were seen and spoken to. 9 carers and 11 children returned pre-inspection questionnaires. 22 questionnaires were returned by social workers in relation to individual placements that had been made. Without exception the responses were positive in their appraisal of the service. The fostering panel was observed in operation. The panel-chair was interviewed. The registered manager, the service manager, link workers, one of the day team workers, an independent social worker and the administrative support team all contributed to the inspection process. A sample of records was reviewed that were selected from a wide range of records requested and made available for inspection.

## **What the service does well:**

The fostering service benefits from experienced and competent management and staff that are committed to providing a high standard of fostering provision.

The fostering service has produced some excellent material in its efforts to provide children and young people with information about fostering and has done well to include young people in the process.

The panel is well organised and its membership includes a high level of expertise and experience. The panel contributes much to ensuring that carer's suitability is properly assessed.

Education, contact and health care is well organised and some proactive measures have been taken to deliver high quality services in these areas.

The service has valued the contribution that consultation brings to service provision and has done well in its efforts to seek the views of its stakeholders.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

Measures were being taken to ensure that foster carers approval status is formally reviewed where placements are being considered outside of their current range.

A review of the referral and matching process has led to a greater emphasis being put upon placing authorities to provide relevant information concerning children and young people that they refer and place.

Additional measures have been taken to promote health awareness and meet children and young peoples health care needs.

Action has been taken to review with carer's aspects of the support provided to them including respite.

### **What they could do better:**

The fostering service could do more to convey to stakeholders of the service the outcome of consultation and quality assurance. It could do more to share with them on an occasional but regular basis the current position of the service in terms of meeting its aims and plans for the future.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Being Healthy

## The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:**

The health and development of children and young people is promoted by the fostering service.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Good diet, opportunities to exercise, advice about keeping safe and personal care were some of the ways children and young people have said they were helped to stay safe and healthy. In the records inspected was correspondence and notes that indicated there was working partnerships and communication between those involved in looking after and promoting children's health. Foster carers contribute to providing a monthly summary of children's placements to their placing authorities. The fostering service seeks to ensure information about children's health and medical status is obtained, updated and managed appropriately. Foster carers commented that the agency has passed on information of this nature to them and acted on their requests to obtain more information when this has been required. The matching process takes into account health and medical needs when a placement is being considered. The fostering service was funding places on a swimmers life saving award to encourage young people over 16 to take their sport further. February 2006 was designated health promotion month by the fostering service. A number of initiatives were organised to raise awareness on several themes such as healthy eating, teenage pregnancy and sources of advice and support. The fostering service was clearly focussed, committed to and invested in, providing high quality provision in this area of children and young peoples lives.

## 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

The persons carrying on and managing the fostering service are fit to do so.

The fostering service takes care to ensure that children are placed with foster carers whose skills and circumstances match the needs to be met.

The fostering service takes seriously the need to maintain and promote children's welfare and safety and in doing so has contributed to protecting children from abuse and neglect.

The recruitment process is such that it ensures that people working for the fostering service are suitable to do so.

The fostering panel is operated in a way that serves to ensure foster carers approvals and reviews are scrutinised and carried out in a proper manner.

### **EVIDENCE:**

Persons carrying on the fostering services have undergone the prescribed checks in terms of their background and character. The outcome of these checks has been satisfactory. No information has come to light to contradict these findings. The fostering service draws on specialist expertise for advice and consultancy in a number of areas. These include fostering, social work, health and education and financial and business advice. Expertise in health and

safety, legal advice and employment law has also been sourced. The arrangements promote good fostering practice and the attainment of positive outcomes for children and young people.

Four foster homes were visited during this inspection. In each case the accommodation provided was warm and adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. All of the children living with the foster carers were seen and/or spoken to. All indicated that they were satisfied with the standard of accommodation provided and that their needs for privacy and space was being met. The fostering service undertakes regular visits to foster carer's homes and conducts health and safety checks aiming to ensure they are kept free of avoidable hazards. Enhancing the work of the service, an independent organisation is used to provide consultancy and advice in areas where health and safety hazards may be unusual or requiring specialist assessment such as swimming pools, smallholdings and farms.

There were a number of records that documented the factors taken into account in the matching process. Initial assessment of referrals includes an analysis of the strengths, shortfalls, possible gains and challenges presented by each potential match. Individual foster carer profiles and safe care policies have been developed and these add further to the information that is used to help inform the matching process. Link workers and foster carers described a collaborative process of matching that takes into account factors that include education and contact, other children in the home, the skills and experience of foster carers and the needs of children for whom a placement is sought.

Contributing to the aim of promoting children's welfare and safety the training programme for foster carers includes child protection, safe caring skills and positive behaviour management. Since the last inspection carers have been supported to develop safe care guidelines particular to their own circumstances and those of the children that are placed with them. The foster care agreement stipulates that corporal punishment is not acceptable. Systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. Allegations against foster carers have been treated seriously and investigated according to procedures. Clear written guidance in relation to children missing from foster care is included in the carer's handbook. The service has strengthened provision in this area with the development of advocacy and listening services, including advocacy for children who foster. This practice goes beyond that which is required to meet the standard and for which the fostering service is commended.

A selection of records demonstrating the recruitment process used by the fostering service was inspected. The records illustrated that there is an awareness of the checks that must be carried out and that these are being completed. Those working for the service are suitably qualified and experienced in relation to their function and roles. Staff demonstrated a good

level of knowledge in relation to their role and of specific issues relevant to children placed and the foster carers looking after them.

The fostering panel has written policies and procedures about the handling of its functions. The procedures cover decision-making when all members of the panel are not in agreement. Panel membership includes people with expertise in child health and education. The panel fulfils a quality assurance function in terms of feeding back to the registered provider about the quality of assessments and reviews presented. Observation of the panel indicated there is rigorous analysis of the information under consideration; the written records of proceedings, which were to a good standard, strengthen this view. The panel benefits greatly from having efficient administrative support and a dedicated independent advisor.

# 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.

Children benefit from a fostering service that values diversity.

Children benefit from a service that recognises the value and importance of education and one that aims to ensure they are given appropriate support in relation to educational development and progress.

NMS 31 not applicable at the time of this inspection.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality are all factors that are taken into account by the fostering service in its matching process. On occasions where this process has identified shortfalls in a match action has been taken to compensate, for example linking in with additional resources, training and people support. Diversity and anti discriminatory practice are included in the topics covered in the training provided by the fostering service to carers, staff and panel members. The service seeks to incorporate in its policies, procedures and practice, clear and consistent language that strengthens its position towards promoting diversity. Children and young people confirmed they had been able to develop their interests and pastimes whilst living with their foster carers.

Support group training provided to foster cares includes sessions and activities designed to promote educational outcomes for children. Building awareness of personal education plans is one example of a topic covered in this way. Guest speakers attending the groups was another example provided. The foster care

agreement and placement agreements were explicit in the role foster carers were expected to fulfil in terms of promoting children's education. Some of the children visited were proud to tell of their individual achievements and show examples of their work. All of the children and young people who have offered an opinion regarding education have spoken positively about the help they have been given. The fostering service operates a nomination scheme that rewards children and young people for positive gains in education attendance, conduct and behaviour. For those not in full time mainstream education there is a structured daytime programme. At the time of this inspection there was four children and young people who were involved in the programme. Staff from the daytime programme also provides direct input to schools to help support a young persons placement; for example accompanying a young person in school for planned periods. The fostering service has made arrangements to commission independent tutoring for young people at the request of and in negotiation with placing authorities.

# **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 are being supported by the fostering service to build, maintain and develop positive contact with families and friends.

The fostering service values and invests in consultation with children, young people, professional agencies and families in terms of decision making and in the aim to continuously improve quality of care.

## **EVIDENCE:**

In placement agreements, the foster carers handbook and included in policies and procedures is reference to the arrangements to promote contact. The fostering service provides training to foster carers that covers working with birth parents. Transport and supervision for contact has been arranged when required, as has financial support. Processes and outcomes of contact are clearly documented and feed into monthly summaries and care reviews. The fostering service has done well to capitalise on a partnership with a nationally recognised contact centre, for the benefit of children and young people placed through its provision.

Completed pre inspection questionnaires indicated that children and young people felt that they were being consulted with and listened to by their foster carers, their social workers and by the fostering service. The only area where the responses indicated a negative trend concerned not being asked about how the fostering service could be made better. Supporting young people to contribute and take part in their care reviews, sharing information with young people, organising forums and by seeking young peoples input to monthly placement summaries are all means by which the fostering service has promoted consultation. Work has taken place with young people in developing

welcome packs and a DVD to tell other children and young people about services provided. Two members of staff are developing a specific advocacy role to compliment that already provided by link workers and foster carers. A group has been established to provide an opportunity to children who foster to meet as a group with people from the fostering service and focus on their experiences and roles in foster care. Regular individual consultancy is a resource made available to foster carers.



# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

## The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

14 & 29

The fostering service works to promote positive transitions from care into independence and young adulthood.

The fostering service pays carer's there agreed allowance and expense in a timely and professional manner.

## EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has provided training to carers that covers leaving care and preparing for adulthood. Subject to young peoples age and understanding support to develop domestic, budgeting and self-care skills has been provided. The daytime programme has been instrumental in organising work experience opportunities. Links with other agencies working with young people at school leaving age have been established. The fostering service has been mindful to ensure that pathway plans have been developed with young people preparing for independence. The fostering service continues to offer support to some young people who have left care for example with housing, advocacy, practical arrangements, information and as a point of referral. Direct links with the Department for Education and Skills Care Leaving Team have been described helping the service to remain at the forefront in developments of this aspect of fostering provision.

Foster carers have confirmed that they receive allowances and expenses as per the written information they have been provided with and that these payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed each year. It was confirmed information about fees and allowances is distributed to the relevant parties. Arrangements have been made for foster carers to seek individual and group advice from the service's finance officer.



# 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, and 24 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, 2, 4, 5, 17, 21, 24, 26.

The fostering service provides useful and up to date information about its operation and available resources. The service is managed such that meeting children and young people's needs is at the forefront of service provision and development. The operation of the service is closely monitored and controlled; there is a commitment to internal quality assurance.

There is good staffing provision. Foster carers are offered appropriate levels of support and supervision.

Comprehensive case records for children were maintained. Records are maintained such that they contribute to quality assurance and towards providing a history of service delivered.

The office from which the fostering service operates provides a good standard of accommodation and is commensurate with its routine activities.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The statement of purpose and the children's guide provide useful and up to date information about the fostering service. A DVD providing introductory information to children and young people was in the final stages of production at the time of the inspection. Young people using the services have been involved in making the DVD and feature in the final edit. The statement of purpose was dated January 2006. The registered manager asserts that all staff review the statement collectively and annually.

The people managing the service are qualified and experienced to do so. The registered manager and the service manager, who deputises in the managers absence, both have a wealth of skills, experience and qualifications in fostering, social work, childcare and management. The service manager and the registered manager both serve on the committee of the county fostering forum and engage with national fostering leads aiming to help shape and remain at the forefront of practice development in fostering. The overall positive findings in this report reflect a service that is managed effectively and efficiently.

From discussion with carers and those working for the fostering service it was ascertained that there are clear roles for managers and staff and well-established lines of communication and of accountability between managers, staff and carers. The fostering service have developed database systems to record, maintain and use operational information in ways which allow the retrieval of specific information either singularly or within a broader report. The system lends itself to identifying trends, patterns and anomalies in operational factors and thus adds to the tools used to monitor and improve the quality of service provision. The recommendation was made to consider ways by which outcomes, reviews and plans arising from quality assurance and consultation exercises could be conveyed back to stakeholders of the service on an occasional but regular basis.

Foster carers receive regular practice supervision from trained and experienced staff. Issues in supervision are carried forward and monitored via line management. The service is moving towards a fully social work qualified team.

The foster care agreements set out key issues in relation to children and young peoples placements. Foster carers have made positive comments regarding the level of support that they receive including that which is provided out of hours. The assessment procedure for carers is thorough. The service has incorporated good practice guidelines as they have been developed.

There are clear strategies informing day-to-day work with foster carers. Evidence was seen and heard of different situations where the service has provided support and given help when it is needed. There are several tiers of support encompassing practical assistance and advice, professional social work supervision and support and access to management and senior personnel. Predominantly foster carers have reported satisfaction with the level of support they had received.

Administrative records were well organised, easily retrieved and in the main comprehensive. Children and young peoples case notes and foster carers files were to a good standard. Record management took into account confidentiality and security and disaster recovery.

The premises were suitable for the purposes of the fostering service. The main office is accessible to staff during normal office hours. There are training, meeting and hospitality rooms and the building is set in its own grounds with gardens. There is also a small office in Chatham that is used as a base by social workers supporting foster carers living in Medway.

# 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

NO

**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

**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.	FS4	The registered manager should consider ways by which outcomes, reviews and plans arising from quality assurance and consultation exercises could be conveyed back to stakeholders of the service on an occasional but regular basis.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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