



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Next Step Fostering Services

Wrens Hill House

Rushett Lane

Norton

Faversham

Kent

ME13 0SH

29th – 31st March 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Next Step Fostering Services

Tel No

01795 521739

Address

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

Fax No

01795 522707

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

H050000819

Name of Registered Provider

Next Step Fostering

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Ms Lesley Ann Ward

Date of first registration

2nd February 2004

Date of latest registration certificate

2nd February 2004

Registration Conditions Apply?

NO

Date of last inspection

07/01/04

Date of Inspection Visit		29th March 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Patrick Gough	145469
Name of Inspector	2	Barry Cadman	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Ms Lesley Ward	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

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Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The Agency's office is based in a large, three storey, detached property set in large grounds in the rural location of Norton, about three miles from the town of Faversham. Various improvements have been made to the building including the construction of a conservatory, which will be used primarily as a meeting room.

The Agency is well established and supports foster carers in North, Mid and East Kent.

At the time of the inspection, Next Step Fostering was providing support for fifty-two children and young people, including a mother and baby, in thirty-three foster homes.

The Responsible Individual and the Registered Manager are both qualified social workers and have considerable experience in childcare practice and management. There are twelve other staff, including a finance manager, four link social workers, four administrators, two daytime programme workers and an administrator/link worker assistant.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This inspection was conducted by two inspectors over a three-day period. During that time the inspectors interviewed the responsible individual, the manager, other agency staff, the panel chair and the panel advisor. The inspectors also visited four foster homes, viewed the premises, inspected records and had discussions with carers and children. The inspection also involved reading policy and practice documentation, young peoples' files, personnel files, an analysis of the inspection surveys completed by young people, carers and placing authorities and other records. The findings of the inspection are based on these exercises and on the pre-inspection material provided by the agency prior to the inspection.

Young people commented favourably about the care they receive from the carers and refer to being consulted by the carers and the agency, for example, 'what I want to do on my birthday' and 'where I want to go on holiday.' There were positive comments about support with education, the range of activities and on the whole they stated that they felt imposed sanctions were fair.

Carers expressed satisfaction with the level of support they received from the agency through link workers and the daytime programme. Other positive comments referred to 'the strong support network among carers' the extremely well organised team' and one carer stated 'at times I would struggle getting things done by the LA and the Fostering Agency has given me a lot of help and support in this matter'. There were a small number of issues expressed by carers, some of which are referred to in the body of the report and all of the issues were discussed with the agency, who promised to address them where appropriate. The comments from placing authorities were similarly very positive. They were of the view that contact and therapies that are provided are appropriate and effective. All of the respondents were satisfied that the young people were in a safe placement, that they were aware of behaviour management and control methods All except three stated that they viewed the carers as being very good with the other three stating that they were quite good. All responses indicated that the agency's liaison with placing authorities is seen as exceptional.

The staff stated that 'it is a good agency to work for'

These comments support the inspectors' view that the agency is well managed, looks after its staff, is supportive to carers and focussed on the needs of the young people.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

Standard 1 was assessed and met.

The recommendation made at the previous inspection was addressed.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

1 of 2 standards assessed and met.

The agency has a good system to process checks and keeps the list updated.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

Not assessed.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

All standards were assessed. 5 were met.

The foster homes were viewed to be safe and to provide good quality accommodation with the necessary furnishings and equipment. There were examples of good practice where cultural needs were assessed as having been addressed, whilst there was evidence of a need to develop some services.

There were sound child protection and behaviour management policies and practice. The agency continues to promote contact in a proactive way and supports carers in the process. There is a good complaints policy produced for young people, carers and placing authorities. There are gaps in the area of young peoples health promotion but in contrast the agency provides good educational support. Training is planned to provide carers with the necessary skills to enable young people for adulthood.

There will be recommendations in relation to diversity, matching, the allegations register, complaints and health promotion.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

6 standards were assessed and met.

Although the agency has a thorough recruitment process and sets out to engage the highest quality staff, it is recommended that where there are shortfalls in the required competencies a support package is put in place. There is a sufficient number of competent staff in the agency and the agency is viewed to provide a high quality of management and support to carers. Training plans are very good and it was acknowledged that the agency had made significant progress in this area.

Records (Standards 24-25)

Standard 24 was assessed and met.

It was acknowledged that the agency has made consistent efforts to access important information from placing authorities to assist carers in working with the young people. The agency will be recommended to explore every conceivable method to secure essential information.

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (Standard 26)

Not assessed.

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

2 standards were assessed. 1 was met.

There are good financial systems in place and the agency according to the accounts presented to the inspectors is in good financial shape. There will be a recommendation that there is greater clarity for carers as to what their financial entitlements are.

Fostering panels (Standard 30)

This standard was assessed and met.

Panel meeting minutes and interviews with the panel chair and advisor informed the inspectors that the composition and function of the panel is in line with the standard and regulations. The meeting minutes indicate that it operates effectively.

Short term breaks (Standard 31)

Not applicable.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

Not applicable.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Pat Gough	Signature	<i>P Gough</i>
Second Inspector	Barry Cadman	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Brian Wintle-Smith	Signature	_____
Date	27.04.05.		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	34, 40	FS8	The agency shall ensure that all placements that are made are in accordance with the approval status of the foster carer	1/06/2005
2	34	FS8	The agency shall secure the relevant information, set out in Schedule 6, required to aid the matching process.	1/06/2005

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS7	The agency should proceed with plans to enhance the provision for children with disabilities and the additional support, in the guise of resources and training, for the carers.
2	FS9	The agency should make reference, in its register, to where details on the outcomes of child protection allegations can be found.
3	FS12	The agency should place greater emphasis on the promotion of young people's health through its policies, guidance to carers and accessing essential information from the placing authority.
4	FS21	The agency should review its respite care arrangements so that there is adequate support for carers who require such a facility.
5	FS24	The agency should explore the various means available to access the information concerning the background of the young person and other circumstances relevant to enabling them to progress with their life.
6	FS29	The agency should provide greater clarity relating to payments to carers and their entitlements.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent	3
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	NO
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	29/03/05
Time of Inspection	9.00AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	26

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A recommendation was made following the previous inspection for the Agency 'to include information in the children's guide as to how a child can secure access to an independent advocate'. This is now included in the guide. The agency intends to further develop the guide with the production of a DVD. Each child receives a copy of the welcome pack prior to, or on commencing placement.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

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

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
The inspectors evidenced a number of personnel files and were satisfied that references were obtained and followed up with telephone enquiries. There was good evidence that CRB checks had been made on agency staff and carers. The CRB checklist clearly indicated that checks had been conducted and where they had been updated/renewed. All other elements of Schedule 1 were completed. The agency has created a very good checklist, which indicates what has been completed in the recruitment process and what remains to be done. The agency is advised to use this format effectively as the inspectors found that the checklist in some of the files sampled had not been completed.		

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed.

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

X

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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

X

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors visited four foster homes and spoke with the foster carers and young people. All the accommodation was adequately spacious and clean. The young people's bedrooms were comfortable, nicely furnished and well equipped. The young people confirmed that their privacy is respected and that they are included in family life. Regular health and safety checks, conducted by the link workers, monitors home safety and risk assessments inform appropriate action. Health and safety training is provided by the agency. The responses in the young people's surveys reflect the inspectors' view that the agency ensures that foster homes are safe and provide a good living environment to support quality development.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The agency has an equal opportunities policy, which is supplemented by a policy on diversity. The policy states that 'Next Step provides specialist advice and support to carers and staff where children's diverse needs are such that additional input is needed'. There are many examples where the agency's practice supports this statement. Contact was made with a Vietnamese teacher to enable a young person to maintain and develop their cultural links and recognising that there is currently a predominance of white European foster carers, the agency engages a black independent worker to advise carers and staff on cultural issues pertaining to the young people in their care. The Agency recognises however that it needs to improve and develop its provision for children with disabilities and complex needs. One foster carer referred to the 'provision of more access for disabled children' and two carers commented on the need to provide better resources for disabled children and their carers. Occupational assessments have been done to look at resource implications. Referring to the 'very demanding task', one carer indicated that at times 'additional support is needed' and this should be supported by the provision of training specific to the child's individual needs. To the agency's credit, plans are already in place to address these issues and the same carers confirm that the agency has included them in the consultation process to determine what is required and how it should be provided. There will be a recommendation that the agency progresses its plans to develop the provision for children with disabilities.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)		
Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
There was evidence in the carer's files that pre-approval assessments contained comprehensive information to inform the matching process. There are, however, inconsistencies in the practice, of accessing information from other relevant authorities, particularly placing authorities. In some cases, the child's placement plan was not available at the time the matching considerations were addressed. Although the agency strives to acquire the relevant information through repeated requests to the placing authority there was limited information on health and other aspects of the child's background, in some of the files. There was evidence that in a minority of cases placements were made above the agreed age range. In one instance where a placement was agreed for one night and it was known not to be within the terms of approval, it was submitted to the following panel meeting for retrospective approval. There were clear written records of the reasons why the decision was made. There will be a requirement that adequate information on the young person to be placed, particularly involving emergency placements, is secured to assist with the matching process and that the placement is within the agreed approval status.		

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)		
The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
The training provided by the agency for carers adequately covers the required content indicated in the standard. From training records produced by the agency it was found that just under 50% of carers had completed child protection training and it is the stated intention that all carers participate. The Agency has a good child protection policy, consistent with local ACPC procedures, in place. The agency's child protection allegations register did not provide sufficient detail and there will be a recommendation that outcomes of allegations are 'signed off' and there is a reference to where they are further detailed. Over 80% of carers had completed the training on sexual abuse awareness and behaviour management and bullying and harassment is covered in additional courses offered to carers to develop their skills. Other training courses such as child development and child observation equip the carers with skills to support the young people in developing their self-esteem. Safe caring guidelines are provided and the agency's recent self-audit identified the need to review 'safe-caring' training. There is a clear statement that corporal punishment is not acceptable. The responses in the children's surveys indicated that there is little or no incidence of bullying.		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	100	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The agency has a good 'promoting contact' policy and clear procedures indicate how contact arrangements, if appropriate, are established. There was evidence that contact issues are considered at the commencement of placement, although where emergency placements are considered, as already stated; the provision of relevant information is often delayed. Training on the importance of contact is covered and a 'supporting contact workshop' is featured in the training matrix. The agency provides the necessary support and guidance where difficult situations, relating to contact, arise and support contact according to agreed arrangements, although one carer reported that contact arrangements had changed, i.e., increased contact, without the clear agreement of all parties. The inspectors saw evidence of written records of contact in the carer's files.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Carers are made aware of the importance of listening to children through 'direct work technique training and elements of Pro Act training focuses on the need for carers to 'tuned into' non-verbal communication. A number of carers attend a counselling skills course. The young people who responded through the inspection surveys were complimentary about the level of consultation experienced within placements and indicated that they were usually consulted by the agency. There was an exceptionally good positive response from placing authorities on their experiences relating to the degree of liaison, communication and consultation practised by the agency. One complaint had been registered with the agency since the previous inspection. This was considered to be a very low incidence considering the number of carers affiliated to the agency. The inspectors suggested that three issues, detailed in carers responses in the inspection surveys could have been presented as complaints. The agency was advised to include reference to 'what constitutes a complaint' in the carer's training. The inspectors acknowledged that the agency had produced a clear policy on complaints.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The agency supports carers in acquiring the relevant health provision, within their area, for the young people in their care, however one carer reports that they had to wait a number of years for a specific therapy which was identified for their young person. There was evidence that placing authorities are being negligent in not providing the agency with a full description of the health needs of the child prior to their placement, and in many cases there is no written health record presented to the carer. This is exacerbated by the high level of emergency placements accepted by the agency. There is no policy or set of procedures governing the promotion of young people's health and practice suggests that attention to health needs is reactive rather than proactive. There will be a recommendation that young people's health is promoted more positively and that policies, training and agency and carer practice, reflect this.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The agency's policies, guidance and information gathering supports foster carers and educational establishments in promoting the young people's education. Only four out of the fifty-seven young people placed are not currently in mainstream education. The needs of those awaiting introduction to school receive input on a number of days, weekly, through the 'Daytime Programme', where two designated staff engage the young people in an academic content, social skills exercises and community based activities. Carers were complimentary about the agency's efforts to maintain and promote the young people's learning experiences and some of the young people, in turn, reported that they received assistance with homework and school attendance. The young people's files contained IEPs and review reports and supervision notes included discussion on educational progress and attainment.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Following the previous inspection there was a recommendation for the agency 'to provide foster carers with training, appropriate to meet the demands of the standard'. This has not yet been achieved, however the agency has attempted to address the need. Training arranged through an external body was cancelled, through no fault of the agency, and has now been re-scheduled. The inspectors accept therefore that the recommendation is being acted upon. The requirement for carers to prepare young people for transition to adulthood is implicit in the guidance and could have a greater impact if the subject had a higher profile. Discussions with carers support the view that they are clear on their responsibilities to promote the young people's development and samples of supervision records indicate that it features prominently on the supervisor's agenda.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency has a clear recruitment policy and implements procedures, which maintain the safety of young people in the care of foster carers. The staff and carers, who were interviewed, confirmed that it was a rigorous system and that checks were conducted and references obtained. The inspectors sampled some personnel records, which provided evidence of this. It was noted that the link worker did not meet the requirements of the standard in relation to qualifications and experience. However, the link worker does not hold social worker responsibility, is on a course to obtain suitable qualification, is undertaking a child observation course and the agency ensures that the member is supervised regularly. The inspectors advised that future appointments reflect the requirements of the standard relating to qualifications and experience.

Total number of staff of the agency:

15

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

X

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)
The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The agency has a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced staff to adequately supervise and support the carers. There is provision to cover shortfalls in staffing levels, if they occur, and the recent audit of the service reveals that other link workers would provide support 'and on-call contingency planning forms part of the management structure'. The administration team, one of which has responsibility for assisting with the referrals process, was viewed to be efficient and well managed. The assessment of prospective foster carers was evidenced to be thorough and fair and carers, in discussion with the inspectors, confirmed the effectiveness of the process.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

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

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
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Following the previous inspection the agency was recommended 'to consider constructing staff training profiles and a training plan and/or a training matrix in order to demonstrate how the agency provides staff with training appropriate to their roles and responsibilities'. This has now been achieved. There is a good staff training profile and development plan. The written training matrix, also computerised, was updated on 23/04.2005 and included an impressive range of training opportunities relevant to their roles. Similarly there was a clear training matrix detailing training, provide as an on-going programme over a two-year cycle. this was colour coded, included all carers and, again, an impressive array of training courses. There has been significant development since the last inspection and the provision is now close to commendable.

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

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6) The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There is appropriate guidance to supervising and supporting staff on their role in assisting carers and carers are informed through the handbook, which is currently being updated. Supervising visits occur regularly, at least monthly, sometimes three-weekly. There is good out-of-hours support, as confirmed by carers in discussion and through surveys. There was evidence in the files of good communication between the link worker and the placing authority social worker. Two carers referred to the intensity of the supervision and time commitment attached to their specific placements and commented on the need, in particular instances, for the agency to provide a form of 'respite'. It was suggested that the successful development of 'respite' carers led to the agency engaging them as full time carers, subject to Panel approval, and this then reduced their 'respite' capacity. This was acknowledged by the agency representatives and will feature in further development of the service. There will be a recommendation that the agency review and develop respite arrangements.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10) The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There were many examples of good practice from the supervision records. The supervision notes reflect a good focus on important issues, appropriate examination of carer's practice and helpful guidance/support, which is followed up on subsequent visits.</p>		

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

At the previous inspection the agency the agency was recommended 'to ensure that carers are provided with the necessary training to meet the needs of each child placed'. As commented upon under a previous standard, 19, the agency has made impressive progress in its approach to meeting carer's training needs. The manager stated that up to 70% of carers had completed Pro Act training. The agency has acquired a trainer to deal with issues concerning the care of children with disabilities and is developing networks to access advice and support for carers on disability.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The case records were generally good, up-to-date, well organised and easy to negotiate. There was evidence that carers are informed about the circumstances surrounding the young person being in care and the reason for their placement. Difficulty in accessing vital information from the placing authority remains a problem and the agency representatives stated that telephone requests backed by written requests are made but not always successful. The lack of essential information relating to the young person's background has a frustrating impact on carer's attempts to enable the young person to understand their past and make progress in their current situation. There will be a recommendation that an agency representative, with permission, visits the placing authority office to access this essential information if their other attempts fail.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)			
The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.			
Key Findings and Evidence		Standard met?	0
This standard was not assessed.			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			X
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £		X	Maximum £
			X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors were supplied with information on the current financial status of the agency and the current annual account details. They were satisfied that there were good procedures in place to effectively regulate the service and the details provided indicated that the agency is financially sound.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

All carers who were spoken to or completed inspection surveys stated that payments from the agency were promptly dispatched. One carer expressed some confusion about the various payment scales and indicated that there was a lack of clarity on what payments carers are entitled to. There will be a recommendation that the agency provides greater clarification payment entitlements.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors were unable to attend a panel meeting but arrive at their findings through inspection of panel meeting minutes and discussion with the panel chair and the panel advisor. Panel meetings were organised and conducted appropriately. There is a good representation on the panel reflecting the requirements of the standard and regulations. Assessment and review report were adequately written and presented to panel and were viewed by panel to be appropriate and consistent with guidance. Evidence from the meeting minutes indicated that there is appropriate discussion, with probing questions prior to any decision making. There was evidence of 'core panel group' meetings being held, in between full panel meetings. It was established that this forum was functioning within the regulations, however the agency was advised to change the title of the forum to avoid confusion with the operation and function of the full panel.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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This standard is not applicable.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
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This standard is not applicable.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 29th – 31st March 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 26th May 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

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

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I, _____ of Next Step Fostering, confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I, _____ of Next Step Fostering, am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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