



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Ryancare Fostering Ltd

**Oak House
5A Wellington Road
Wanstead
London
E11 2AN**

Lead Inspector
Gavin Thomas

Announced Inspection
6th, 7th & 13th November 2006 11:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Ryancare Fostering Ltd

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London
E11 2AN

Telephone number 020 8989 4970

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Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Mr Adrian Paul Ryan

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 17th October 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Ryancare Fostering Limited is an Independent Fostering Agency operating from an office based at Wanstead in the London Borough of Redbridge, and has been operational since 2002.

The agency provides a range of services, short and long term fostering, including sibling groups, for children between 0-18 years of age.

All placements are commissioned by a local authority and Ryancare Fostering subscribes to the PAN London Agreement.

The service aims to meet the identified needs of children and young people placed with them and to fully support foster carers within that task.

The agency operates with a small but experienced team of staff who have a broad range of experiences.

Ryancare Fostering places a strong emphasis on support, training and supervision with the aim of providing a high and consistent standard of care to the children and young people placed in their care.

Placement fees are charged at £109.60 per day. Variations to this fee are negotiated with the Placing Authority and in accordance with the needs of the child/young person.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection took place over three days. The following formed the basis of this inspection:

- Pre – inspection meeting.
- Discussions with the Director, Acting Manager, Supervising Social Workers, Office Manager, Company Secretary & Panel Chair.
- Discussions with foster carers.
- Discussions with two young people.
- Observation of a Foster Panel.
- Attendance at a Foster Care Support Meeting and discussion with those present.
- Visits to two foster homes.
- Inspection of various records and documents.

The CSCI distributed questionnaires to foster carers, children/young people and Placing Officers for the purpose of this inspection.

Foster Carers – Five completed questionnaires were received. A summary of the responses received were as follows:

- Three foster carers confirmed that the agency provides good twenty – four hour care and advice when needed.
- The service offered is excellent.
- One foster carer rated the service as being adequate and one rated the service as being good at involving children/young people in decision-making processes.
- The service was rated as being good and excellent for the following:
 - Providing support in helping children/young people to achieve educationally
 - Opportunities for children/young people to undertake activities in the community
 - Maintaining placements and support for children/young people to be healthy and have healthy lifestyles.
- One foster carer stated that the service was good and one stated that the service was excellent at addressing issues of equality and diversity such as culture, ethnicity and disability.
- One foster carer stated that they should have more contact. (This comment was non-specific). This foster carer also stated that the agency is supportive and helpful.

Children/young people – Five completed questionnaires were received. A summary of the responses received were as follows:

- The three children/young people stated that they always get help and support about being healthy.
- The three children/young people confirmed that they are not being bullied. One child/young person did state that they were being bullied at school but this stopped when their foster carer intervened.

- The three children/young people confirmed that they would know who to talk to if they were not happy.
- The three children/young people stated that they are always being helped to think about their future.
- The three children/young people stated that they feel well cared for where they are living.
- One child/young person stated that only sometimes they are listened to by their Social Worker. The child/young person stated that there is a communication issue and the Social Worker is never available.
- One child/young person stated that their Social Workers have never listened to them about their wishes and feelings. The child/young person gave examples of a wide range of reasons as to why they believe that they are unable to be successful and reach their full potential particularly with their education, because of decisions made by their Placing Authority.
- The three children/young people were very complimentary about the care and support provided by their foster carers. One foster carer was described as being the best person in the world.

Social Workers – Two completed questionnaire were received. A summary of the responses were as follows:

- The agency provides excellent support to its carers.
- Communication between the agency and the child's Social Worker is excellent.
- The agency does everything to achieve the best outcomes for the child.
- The agency was rated as being "excellent" for the support given to foster carers and children with regards to education, including direct liaison with schools.
- The agency monitors the suitability of placements frequently.
- The Social Worker stated that this is an excellent service and Ryan Care is the best fostering agency they have used in their professional career.
- The Supervising Social Workers takes time to meet and speak with children/young people.

Verbal responses were received from one Social Worker as follows:

- The agency provides a professional service.
- The Director, Social Work staff and Administrative staff are supportive and co operative.
- Communication between the agency and the Placing Authority is very good.
- The agency does well in matching a child/young person with a suitably experienced foster carer.
- Experience of foster carers is that they do a "brilliant" job in meeting the needs of a child/young person.
- Foster carers provide high standards of care.
- Overall, the agency does well in meeting the needs of individual children/young people.

The Inspector attended part of a foster carers support group. Foster carers were very positive about the matching processes, support and advice from the agency.

Some foster carers did express concerns about the inconsistency with the support children/young people receive from their Placing Authorities. One foster carer was of the opinion that some of the training provided is repetitive. The foster carer also gave examples of the types of training they would like to receive. This was referred to Director to discuss further with the foster carer.

Several matters were brought to the attention of the Inspector about the conduct and performance of one team within a Placing Authority. It was evident from discussions with the child/young person, foster carer and the Director that there were on going shortfalls with the way in which one placement in particular was being managed by the Placing Authority. The agency was concerned for the future of the child/young person and had expressed these concerns to the Placing Authority.

The Inspector takes this opportunity in thanking everyone who contributed to this inspection.

What the service does well:

The agency provides child centred care and support. This was demonstrated in a number of ways. This includes stringent matching processes and stability of placements.

Excellent support systems were in place for staff, carers and young people. Staff are motivated by a strong and well-experienced management team. The agency does exceedingly well in providing additional resources to enable children/young people to reach their full potential. The agency is proactive in reviewing and developing current systems in place and for introducing new systems to ensure positive outcomes for children/young people and foster carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has developed quality monitoring and data systems. All of which were of a very high standard, effective and well managed.

The agency hosted a "Family Day" this year for all foster carers and their families, children/young people and staff. The feedback received from foster carers and staff was very positive.

What they could do better:

The agency was doing exceptionally well in meeting the criteria as set out in all of the key standards assessed. At the time of this inspection, the agency did

devise a more formal process for obtaining details from sessional staff regarding their arrangements for the safety and security of records kept away from the office.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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 at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good.

Children/young people confirm that their carers talk to them about their health. Good health outcomes can be demonstrated or anticipated for the majority of children who are fostered. This can be attributed to the overall agency practices. The service has developed ways in which it evaluates how it achieves good health outcomes for children/young people. It uses valuable resources to promote and secure good health outcomes for children/young people and foster carers in securing a good standard of health for children/young people.

EVIDENCE:

Health related policies and procedures were in place. These were included in the foster carer handbook. The “skills to foster” training also covered health topics. The agency was very supportive of foster carers who are matched with children/young people who have very specific health care needs. Examples of these practices were included in the agency’s Annual Quality Assurance Assessment. The Inspector also noted that foster carer’s abilities to support children with health needs are discussed at panel when household reviews are presented.

Staff confirmed that all children/young people had access to primary health care treatments. One foster carer also confirmed that child/young person in their care was registered with local GP.

The Director confirmed that the agency does not permit foster carers to consent to medical treatment for children/young people. The agency ensures that consent for medical treatment is obtained from the Placing Authority and documented.

When necessary, the agency including foster carers will advocate on behalf of children/young people with regards to children/young people receiving specialist health care treatments.

Health needs were set out in children/young people's care plans and monitored at their reviews. It was noted that health related information was absent from some files examined. This was due to some Placing Authorities not being as prompt as others in providing this information to the agency. Evidence was available to demonstrate the agency's attempts to obtain this information. Staff did explain however, that one Placing Authority requests information on a monthly basis about children/young people's health and education. This was judged to be an example of good multi-agency work between both organisations for ensuring that children/young people's health and welfare needs are being met.

One of the aims for the forthcoming year is to devise a health record for each child/young person in placement. This document would accompany the child/young person when they move on from their foster placement.

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

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

All children are placed with foster carers who have been thoroughly assessed as being able to keep a child/young person safe for the duration of their placement.

Child protection concerns are managed well and actions taken as necessary to implement learning across the agency to ensure there is best practice in keeping children/young people safe.

The fostering panel is extremely effective, with excellent management and effective membership, which is representative of the local community and can demonstrate excellent outcomes for children/young people. The panel demonstrates a robust quality assurance function with regard to the assessment process for foster carers and can evidence that assessments are rigorous and timely.

Manager's staff and foster carers are demonstrably safe to work with children/young people.

EVIDENCE:

All checks as required under Standard 3 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 were in place. Recruitments checks carried out on the Acting Manager were examined and confirmed this.

The Director and the Acting Manager both demonstrated their suitability to carry on and manage this agency. The agency was in the process of recruiting a permanent manager.

Robust systems were in place for ensuring the suitability of foster carers. This included a very detailed assessment of prospective foster carer's home's to determine the suitability of the environment. This is monitored at monthly visits.

The Inspector visited two foster homes. The communal living space in both homes was maintained to a very high standard and fitted with comfortable and "homely" furniture and fixtures. In one home, the young person and the foster carer gave the Inspector a guided tour. The young person was very complimentary about the comfort and quality of the furniture. Both homes met the criteria as set out in Standard 6 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

Foster carers confirmed that the agency does well in keeping them up to date with legislative changes regarding health and safety requirements. The agency has thorough procedures in place for ensuring that foster carers transport is properly insured, taxed and maintained for use with children/young people.

One of the successes of this agency are the stringent processes in place for matching children/young people with foster carers who have the skills, experience and accommodation to meet their needs. This was identified through the assessment of associated National Minimum Standards and through discussions with foster carers on home visits and at the foster carers support group.

The agency provides full support to foster carers for planned and emergency placements. Approximately 25% of the children/young people in foster placements had planned admissions including introductory visits.

Procedures and support systems were in place to support transracial and transcultural placements.

The agency had satisfactory procedures in place for promoting the safety of children/young people. The agency will and within reason, provide additional resources for maximising the safety of a child/young person. Staff and foster carers last attended child protection training in May 2006.

A register of allegations was in place. There were no entries at the time of this inspection. Child protection issues are usually as a result of matters outside of the agency and not related to the provisions of service or mal practice by staff and foster carers employed by the agency. Statistics of cases investigated by Placing Authorities confirmed this.

In addition to policies and procedures, guidance on safe caring practices are included in the foster carer handbook.

The agency was concerned that one Placing Authority's decisions regarding the future of one young person was not within the best interest of the young person and could have an impact on their safety and well-being. The foster carer and the young person in question echoed these views. However, the young person appeared to be distressed and anxious about their future and did not feel that the Placing Authority was addressing their needs and views properly. The young person gave examples as to why they felt safe and settled in their current placement. However, the young person also said that they were beginning to feel unsafe about their future because of decisions made by the Placing Authority. The foster carer explained that due to the conduct of the Placing Authority it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain the placement and to give the young person a sense of security and safety. This matter was on going.

Staff spoken to were not aware of any incidents regarding bullying. Foster carers are made aware of promoting anti – bullying practices. One young person as referred to above, informed the Inspector that they felt they were being bullied by the Placing Authority and had taken action to address this. The young person informed the Inspector that the matter was still being investigated.

A clear procedure was in place if a child is missing from a foster home. This was included in the foster carers handbook. A record is kept of all incidents whereby children/young people abscond from their placements. The agency does well in notifying relevant professionals about these incidents as required under Schedule 8 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. It was noted however, that on one occasion, although the agency reported an incident to the same Placing Authority as referred to above, no action was taken to ensure the young person's safety and for the young person to return to their foster placement. The length of time when the young person was missing from their placement without prompt intervention by the Placing Authority was not judged to be good practice.

Recruitment and selection procedures were in place. The agency does not recruit unqualified staff. There were no students or voluntary staff working for the agency at the time of this inspection. The agency has a small team. All staff demonstrated good knowledge about how the ethos of the agency and how the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations are applied. Sessional staff are employed when required. These staff are vetted and supervised by the Acting Manager.

Recruitment checks as required under Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are obtained prior to offer of appointment. Staff personnel files examined demonstrated that processes in place for requesting and

screening recruitment checks are robust and properly managed. The Inspector examined disclosure forms for all staff and approved foster carers. The agency had a database in place for recording CRB's. This was up to date and well maintained.

The Acting Manager confirmed that all staff who undertakes assessments of prospective foster carers are suitably qualified. All completed assessments seen were thorough and very well written. In particular, the quality of an assessment presented to the panel for approval at the time of this inspection was judged to be of a very high standard.

The Inspector met with the Panel Chair prior to attending the Fostering Panel as an Observer.

The panel chairperson is suitably qualified and experienced and very "professional" in her approach. The panel chair was appointed in December 2003. Outcomes of the discussion with the Panel Chair are as follows:

- There were no vacancies for panel members at the time of the inspection.
- The panel is well served by a team of members who have different professional backgrounds and personal experiences.
- Reports presented to the panel are of a high standard.
- The panel administrator/minute taker is very organised and efficient.
- The agency does well in facilitating training for panel members. (The next training day was scheduled for 18 November 2006).
- The panel chair confirmed that none of the panel members had exceeded two consecutive terms.
- The panel is well – balanced in terms of ethnicity and gender mix.
- The Panel Chair was of the opinion that panel members were competent and skilled. The Chair was also of the opinion that agency was very supportive of the panel including the provided of resources for inductions and training.

The Panel Chair carries out an annual quality assurance exercise.

Questionnaires are distributed to all panel members. This information is then used for a report, which is written by the Panel Chair and presented to the agency. This practice is highly commended.

The fostering panel was conducted in a professional manner. It was interactive and all panel members were given the opportunity to speak and contribute to discussions. All debates and discussions were judged to be constructive and meaningful.

Questions put to prospective foster carers were judged to be appropriate and relevant. Sensitive questions were also asked in a dignified manner.

The information provided for the purpose of this panel was of a very high standard.

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

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

The service actively seeks to recruit foster carers who can meet the diversity needs of the children/young people it serves. Its policies and procedures explicitly promote diversity and equality and its importance in achieving a high standard of care for children/young people.

Children/young people receive excellent additional support, which is characterized by being creative and responsive to a child/young person's individual needs.

Foster carers and staff are supervised and trained to maintain and sustain good links with a child/young person's school.

EVIDENCE:

The agency had good systems in place for acknowledging and promoting diversity and equality. All foster carers spoken to were confident that the agency does exceedingly well with regards to equalities. Foster carers and staff gave examples of how the agency values equality and diversity.

Examples of good practice were seen which evidenced how the agency provides resources, guidance and support with regards to children/young people's ethnicity, culture, religious persuasion, gender and sexuality. When necessary, the agency facilitates the needs of children/young people for rebuilding their esteem, confidence and self-awareness. The agency also provides resources to enable children/young people to learn about their heritage.

The matching process takes into account children/young people's individual needs.

The "skills to foster" training includes a specific topic called "Equal Chance". This covers various matters regarding equal opportunities and diversity.

All children/young people in placements at the time of this inspection were in full time education. Staff explained that once children/young people settle into their placements, they generally do well in catching –up with their education. Records examined confirmed this.

The agency was in the process of developing current systems for collating information on children/young people's educational attainments.

One young person referred to in this report under the section headed " Staying Safe" informed the Inspector that they want to achieve a good education and was confident that this could be achieved in their current placement. However, the young person also explained that their ability to focus on school and achieving a good education was being effected because of the issues they were having with their Placing Authority. The Director of Ryan Care expressed the same concerns for these reasons. The foster carer was very encouraging and supportive of the young person to continue working hard in school to reach their full potential.

School costs are negotiated with Placing Authorities. There was no set guidance in place for who is responsible for the purchase of computers for homework purposes. This is also negotiated with individual Placing Authorities and foster carers.

Two young people informed the Inspector that the provisions for homework were satisfactory. One young person explained that they had agreed specific times with their foster carer for study purposes. This included the use of a computer.

Foster carers are very supportive of children/young people's education. Foster carers confirmed that when required, they attend school meetings. Staff also confirmed that they attend meetings relating to children/young people's education such as PEP (Personal Education Plan) meetings.

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

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

The agency has developed innovative and positive initiatives to ensure that foster carers are involved in helping children/young people make sense of their family relationships and to enable contact arrangements to be successful. Children/young people are always asked for their views and these views make a difference. Children/young people's participation in discussions and decision making about their futures is fully integrated into the agency's policies and planning. The agency has developed imaginative methods of enabling this.

EVIDENCE:

The agency facilitates and monitors contact in accordance with the agreed arrangements. A small percentage of children/young people did not have contact with birth families at the time of this inspection.

Contact arrangements are usually identified at Placement Planning Meetings and monitored by Supervising Social Workers at monthly "Link" visits. The outcomes are recorded. Records examined confirmed this. Contact arrangements are also set out in children/young people's care plans.

The Supervising Social Workers explained that matters or concerns regarding contact are reported to the Placing Authority. Contact arrangements takes into account the needs of parents/families and the child/young person.

When required and where possible, foster carers accompany and/or transport children/young on contact visits. Foster carers confirmed that their expenses are paid for these arrangements. Systems were in place to ensure that the safety of foster carers is not compromised.

The agency consults children/young people in a variety of ways. Children/young people are encouraged and supported to contribute to their reviews. Supervising Social Workers also consult with children/young people at the monthly "Link" visits.

When necessary, foster carers and staff will advocate and speak on behalf of a child/young person. Two young people confirmed this. One young person gave examples about the relationship with their foster carers. The young person explained that they felt "listened to". Another young person confirmed that the agency does well in consulting with them. In particular, the Supervising Social Worker who was supportive of their needs. The young person also confirmed that they were in receipt of a copy of the Children's Guide.

The agency has developed consultation processes since the last inspection. Methodology has been developed to seek the views of children/young people. This was split for the younger and older age groups.

The agency had also devised surveys to seek the views of foster carers, Placing Authorities and birth children about the service. Once implemented, this information will be used for quality assurance purposes.

The agency hosted a "Family Day" since the last inspection. Very positive remarks were made about this day. Foster carers said that they hope this will become an annual event. Foster carers explained that this event gave all foster carers and their families and children/young people in foster placements, an opportunity to socialise and interact. Staff were also of the opinion that the day was very successful.

The agency arranged for all foster carers to be presented with a bouquet of flowers at the family Day as an acknowledgement of their hard work and commitment to the children/young people. This gesture was well received. Foster children, birth children, cousins and foster carers grandchildren were all given gifts and the chance of caricatures.

Standard 31 is a key standard but did not apply to this agency at the time of the inspection and was therefore not assessed.

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):

14 & 29

Quality in this outcome area is good.

Staff and foster carers recognize the importance of children expressing their hopes and ambitions and fully and actively support them with this.

Foster carers receive full allowances, which fully meet the costs of caring for the child/young person. Systems and policies for allowances are easy to understand and allowances are paid promptly.

EVIDENCE:

The Acting Manager confirmed that four young people were planning and preparing to move on to semi – independence. Foster carers are proactive in providing practical support for young people preparing to move on. This includes budgeting, environmental safety, personal safety, life skills such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of clothes, shopping and social skills.

The Acting Manager gave examples of two young people who have successfully moved on from their foster placements to semi-independent living since the last inspection.

The two foster carers visited, gave examples of how they are currently teaching the young people about life skills and responsibilities as they develop and grow into young teenagers. This included self – respect, budgeting and having some control of their lives. The two foster carers explained that this would hopefully prepare the young people for future changes and expectations when as they enter young adulthood. Both young people were responding positively to this guidance and support.

Foster carers spoken to confirmed that their allowances are paid promptly and had no issues with the current system.

Records examined indicated that robust procedures are maintained for paying and monitoring foster carer allowances.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24 & 25

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

The agency's vision and values are explicitly stated in the Statement of Purpose; are evident throughout service delivery and in the day-to-day practice of managers and staff.

The Staff, foster carers and children/young people feel that they are given clear leadership and excellent support and that their views are welcomed, valued and included.

Staff and foster carers are responsive to the needs of children/young people and able to adapt accordingly and provide a flexible service rather than in an unresponsive and routine way, subject to health, safety and other legislative requirements.

EVIDENCE:

A Statement of Purpose was in place. This document included all of the criteria as set out in Standard 1.4 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

There were very clear lines of accountability in place. All staff spoken to were very clear about their roles and responsibilities and to whom they were accountable.

The Acting Manager explained that workloads and caseloads are regularly monitored to maximise efficiency and consistency. All foster carers spoken to were complimentary about the staff team and the knowledge of all placements throughout the team, which signifies good teamwork.

Professional supervision and annual appraisals are provided for all staff. The Director also receives professional supervision from an external consultant.

All staff and foster carers are required to keep abreast of current practices through regular training and development. All staff contribute to the "Skills to Foster" training. This also gives staff the opportunity to work with prospective foster carers as part of their initial assessment.

The Acting Manager confirmed that all social work staff are registered with General Social Care Council.

Human Resources processes were very well maintained.

The office is adequately staffed. The Officer Manager confirmed that equipment and resources are sufficient for the running of the agency. The Inspector observed all staff working well as a team. It was very clear that staff would assist each other when required, regardless of their designation.

The Director confirmed the agency was adequately staffed at the time of this inspection. A review of the staffing policy would be undertaken if the provisions of service increased.

The criteria as set out in Standard 17. 6 and 17.7 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services was included in the "Skills to Foster" training. Records examined confirmed this.

The agency had very good systems in place for managing and supporting foster carers. Foster carers explained that they could rely on the agency at any time of the day for advice and support. In summary, individual foster carers gave the following responses:

- The out of hours on call system is faultless. Calls are always answered promptly.
- All staff are friendly and caring.
- Staff give the impression that they would exceed their duties to ensure that children/young people receive the best outcomes.
- Any of the staff are always readily to assist and are knowledgeable of each other's caseloads.
- Reviews are conducted in a professional manner. This process is always a learning curve.
- The agency provides good training opportunities.

One foster carer presented the agency with an ornamental gift by way of expressing their gratitude to all staff for their on going support during a difficult period for the foster carer. The foster carer also reiterated their comments about the quality of the staff team in a conversation with the Inspector.

Children/young people's case records were in good order and well maintained. As mentioned in this report under the section headed "Being Healthy", the agency continues to prompt some Placing Authorities to provide information relating to the child/young person.

The "Skills to Foster" training includes guidance for foster carers on recording significant life events for the child/young person.

Administrative records required for inspection purposes were accessible and in very good order. Lockable facilities are provided for the storage of confidential records.

A policy on confidentiality was in place. All foster carers and staff are required to sign a declaration with regards to the codes of confidentiality.

The agency had a variety of systems in place for monitoring and tracking purposes. The Office Manager has overall responsibility for maintaining these systems. However, all staff contribute to case files.

The Director had an arrangement in place for the storage of archive files kept away from the office base. The agency did not have a specific procedure in place for ensuring that records kept by sessional staff away from the office are kept in conditions of appropriate security. Prompt action was taken and this was implemented at the time of the inspection.

Administrative records examined included the following:

- Policies and procedures.
- Foster Carers Handbook.
- Consultation forms and surveys.
- Exemptions forms.
- Schedule 8 notifications monitoring and tracking form.
- Tracking forms for recruitment – staff and foster carers.
- Complaints monitoring.
- Unannounced visits to foster carers.
- Registers for foster carers and children/young people.
- Welcome pack for children/young people.
- Induction processes for new staff.

The agency is to be commended for the robust systems in place for managing the implementation and monitoring of the systems and records examined. All of which were of a very high standard and where applicable, child focused.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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