



Champions for  
Social Care  
Improvement

# inspection report

## **Next Step Fostering**

Wrens Hill House

Rushett Lane

Norton

Faversham

Kent

ME13 0SH

7th, 8th & 9th January 2004      This  
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## 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**

info@nextstepfostering.org

**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

YES

**Name of Agency**

Next Step Fostering

**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**

**Name of Registered Provider**

Next Step Fostering

**Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)**

Ms Lesley Ann Ward

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

04/03/03

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		7th January 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:30 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Mr Geoff Standen	079122
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		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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**(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**
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**Part D: Provider's Response**

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**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 National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) 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 NCSC in respect of Next Step Fostering. 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 NCSC 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.**

Next Step Fostering was providing at the time of, and according to information provided for this inspection, placements for fifty-eight children and young people in thirty-one foster homes.

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.

## **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.)

The inspection took place over three days in January 2004. It found that six of the eight requirements and three of the six recommendations made at the last inspection had been achieved. These efforts were to be commended. One new requirement and three new recommendations were made at this inspection.

The Agency demonstrated a pro-active approach to the inspection and had devoted much effort to providing the Commission with detailed information. On each day of the inspection there was a welcoming atmosphere from both staff and carers who conveyed a child-focused approach to their work and a commitment to continue improvements in the practice of the Agency.

The Inspector received completed questionnaires from five foster carers, six children and sixteen Placing Officers. The feedback and information provided in these questionnaires was of a positive nature.

#### **Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)**

##### **0 of 1 standard assessed was met**

The Agency had a written Statement of Purpose and a children's guide. The former was last revised in October 2003. A recommendation to provide fuller information with regard to how a child could secure access to an independent advocate was repeated.

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

##### **2 of the 2 standards assessed were met**

Following checks, interviews and meetings with the Directors of the company, the Commission was satisfied the persons providing the service were fit persons to do so.

#### **Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)**

##### **2 of the 2 standards assessed were met**

The Agency had addressed requirements made at the last inspection to establish systems of monitoring the service. The practice in this regard was of a high standard and a good example for others to follow.

From the inspection of records and meetings with staff and carers the Inspector was satisfied the Agency was managed effectively and efficiently.

#### **Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)**

##### **5 of the 9 standards assessed were met**

The Agency had taken steps to ensure its carers were appropriately trained in methods of Care and Control although this training was still to be delivered. Care Plans and Local Authority Care Plans were available on file. Children confirmed they were consulted about care planning. Children had been registered with doctors, dentists and opticians.

Contact with family was proactively supported and facilitated by the Agency to a level the Inspector considered was in excess of the standard.

The Agency employed a member of staff specifically to deal with referrals. The Inspector considered the available evidence did not match the apparent good practice of the Agency. A recommendation to consider ways in which this could be gathered was made.

Whilst evidence was found of placements being made outside of the terms of approval of carers this was, the Inspector concluded, due to misinterpretation rather than misuse of the regulations.

The Agency had taken steps to address the recommendations made but had not yet achieved three of those made at the last inspection.

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

#### **6 of the 9 standards assessed were met**

The Inspector chose four carers at random to be interviewed as part of the inspection. These carers, together with six returned questionnaires, provided a positive view of the support they receive from the Agency. Similarly, children and young people provided positive responses of the care they receive and had no complaints with regard to the Agency.

Carers were provided with a range of training opportunities. As with other areas the Inspector concluded the good practice described by the Agency was diminished by a lack of correlating evidence.

Meetings with carers and staff and inspection of records and files provided evidence of a thorough recruitment process.

Staff confirmed they felt well supported and received suitable supervision.

### **Records (Standards 24-25)**

#### **2 of the 2 standards assessed were met**

Records at the agency's office and at carers' homes were kept secure. The Agency provided the Inspector with access to all records and information needed to complete the inspection. The quality of files and records had improved since the last inspection. Carers had been provided with training in record keeping.

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

#### **1 of 1 standard assessed was met**

These were considered fit for the purpose.

### **Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)**

#### **2 of the 2 standards assessed were met**

Financial information was made available. The Agency maintained accounts that were audited by an external company. Carers expressed a high level of satisfaction with the financial arrangements.

### **Fostering panels (Standard 30)**

#### **0 of 0 standard assessed was met**

The Inspector had opportunity to meet with the chair of the Fostering Panel but not to attend

a meeting. This standard was therefore not inspected in full.

**Short-term breaks (Standard 31)**

Not assessed as this standard did not apply to the Agency.

**Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)**

Not assessed as this standard did not apply to the Agency.

**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: N/A 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: N/A 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: N/A 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: N/A NO

**The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:**

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

**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	
1	13 (2)(b)	9	To ensure that no child is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable	1 October 2003
2	17 (1)	23	To ensure carers are provided with the necessary training to meet the needs of each child placed.	1 October 2003

**Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission 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 Geoff Standen

Signature G Standen

Second Inspector \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Locality Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date

26.02.04.

## 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 and recommendations 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 (1)(b)	8	That all placements made must be consistent with the terms of approval of each carer.	01/03/2004
2	13 (2)(b)	9	To ensure that no child is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable.	01/10/2004
3	17 (1)	23	To ensure carers are provided with the necessary training to meet the needs of each child placed.	01/10/2004

### 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	1	To include information in the children's guide as to how a child can secure access to an independent advocate.
2	7	To provide staff and carers with training appropriate to meet the demands of the standard.
3	8	To provide greater evidence that demonstrates each child is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs.
4	14	To provide foster carers with training appropriate to meet the demands of the standard.
5	19	To consider constructing staff training profiles and a training plan and/or training matrix in order to demonstrate how the Agency provides staff with training appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.
6	22	To further develop the Agency's practice in respect of the supervision of carers.

\* 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	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• 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	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	07/01/04
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	21.5

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC 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?

2

The Agency had a statement of purpose (SoP) that was last reviewed and revised in October 2003. This was sufficient to meet National Minimum Standards (NMS). The SoP was discussed and reviewed by the staff group at a training day in September 2003.

At the last inspection a recommendation was made for the Agency "To include information in the children's guide as to how a child can secure access to an independent advocate." A copy of the Agency's children's guide was provided. This colourful brochure entitled 'Welcome Pack' had been written and produced as collaboration between staff and children fostered by the agency. Whilst the document had a section providing information for children about how to complain and another section that provided useful telephone numbers, including Childline and the Commission it still did not contain information on how a child could secure access to an independent advocate. The recommendation is repeated.

## 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?	3
The Manager holds the DipSW qualification and an NVQ Level V in Business Management.		
From previous interviews with the Responsible Individual, meetings at this inspection with the senior staff group, and documentation provided, the Inspector was satisfied the Agency meets the Standard.		

### 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 NCSC carried out the required checks and interviews with the Responsible Individual and Registered Manager. All checks were satisfactory and the Commission was satisfied they were suitable persons to run the Agency.		

## 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?

4

At the last inspection two requirements were made. The first required the Agency “To establish clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service as specified in Schedule 7” and the second “To supply the Commission at appropriate intervals with any report in respect of any review conducted”. This had been done –the report was full, informative and provided both statistical data and an analysis of the information gathered that provided the Agency with recommendations and an understanding of what action was need to address identified issues. In addition to this the Agency had established other means of monitoring e.g. management meetings, self-audits and questionnaires. The Inspector considers these practices are in excess of the standard.

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

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

### Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Inspection of staff files provided evidence that each post in the Agency had a job description. Staff and carers reported they were clear about the management structure and confirmed their knowledge of who the Manager was within the organisation. Staff understood the procedure of who deputises in the Manager’s absence. From discussions with the Manager, senior, care and administrative staff, and carers the Inspector took the view the service was managed effectively and efficiently.

## 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?
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Standard met?
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3
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At the last inspection a requirement was made for the Agency "To carry out health and safety risk assessments on all foster homes. This work had been completed and evidence was found of written assessments on foster carers' files.

The Inspector sampled six foster carer files and spoke with foster carers. These provided evidence of foster carers having been subject to a thorough recruitment and assessment process.

The Inspector visited four foster homes. These were spacious enough to comfortably accommodate those living there and were all furnished and decorated to a good standard. Children visited had their own bedroom apart from two siblings of the same gender who shared a bedroom. Those carers visited confirmed they understood they might be interviewed as part of the inspection process.

### 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?
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Standard met?
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2
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At the last inspection a recommendation was made for the Agency "To provide staff and carers with training appropriate to meet the demands of the standard". Whilst staff and carers spoken to provided an appropriate awareness of the subject, the Agency had not yet integrated specific training into its core training programme. The Inspector understood an independent worker delivered training on diversity and anti-discriminatory practice as well as providing support to families where children with cultural needs are identified. However, no written evidence or verbal confirmation was found or given.

The Agency had established clearly stated written policy and guidance in regard to equality issues. These promoted the need to recognise the individual needs of each child.

From his meetings the Inspector concluded the Agency took positive action to address the ethnic, cultural and religious needs of the children placed and that whilst he believed the Agency was meeting the outcome of the standard the need to provide training and/or evidence its delivery remained outstanding.

**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?**

1

The Agency showed a clear commitment to ensuring that careful matches were made when placing children with foster carers approved by the Agency. A worker was employed to deal specifically with referrals and gather information on which senior staff i.e. Manager or Service Manager, could make decisions as to whether to place or not. Whilst the Inspector considered decisions to place were based on good social work principles he advised there was a need to provide fuller information and greater evidence of how these decisions were arrived at. The Inspector was shown the work being undertaken to develop a computer database that would greatly assist the matching process.

During the course of the inspection the Inspector found evidence of foster carers receiving children into their care that was outside of their terms of approval. These particular situations were discussed with the Service Manager who satisfied the Inspector these were made through misunderstanding rather than any disrespect for regulations. It was agreed this practice would cease forthwith.

**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?**

2

At the last inspection a requirement was made for the Agency "To ensure that no child is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable". The Inspector was informed of the steps the Agency had taken to provide foster carers, where assessed as appropriate, with suitable training in this regard. Progress had been made to organise this training although it was still to be delivered. Of five Children's Questionnaires returned, one young person reported they had been held but that this had been done properly.

The Agency had written policy and procedure sufficient to meet the requirements of the standard and Regulation 12 that was consistent with the Area Child Protection Committee. Whilst carers had not attended any courses specifically entitled Child Protection the Inspector was told this formed part of their NVQ III course. Sexual Abuse training had been provided; eighteen carers had not yet attended this training.

**Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:**

X

%

**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 Inspector looked at records and spoke with staff, carers and young people about the ways in which contact is promoted and facilitated. Senior staff also provided further description of the facilities and assistance, including financial support, provided by the Agency. The importance and value of contact forms part of the carers' NVQ training and a training course entitled Supervising Contact has been arranged as part of the core training programme.

After considering the available evidence the Inspector took the view the Agency provided a commendable service to children that was in excess of the standard.

**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

The Inspector received five completed children's' questionnaires and spoke with five children during the inspection. All of the questionnaires and the children that the Inspector met provided a positive response in stating that their foster carers either often asked or sometimes asked their opinions. Carers spoken with provided examples of ways in which they had listened to the views of the children in their care.

Children confirmed they had been provided with a "Welcome Pack" (which includes details of how to make a complaint) and demonstrated an understanding of how they would make a complaint should they need to do so.

**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?**

3

At the last inspection a requirement was made for the Agency "To ensure that each child has access to such medical treatment as he may require". The Agency had written to all responsible authorities requesting medical consents where these had not been provided. This had now been received.

Foster carers confirmed they had been provided with a description of the health needs of children placed in their care. Sampled files contained relevant Looked After Children forms Children's files contained evidence of health records being maintained and of appropriate services being provided for children i.e. GP, dentist and optician. Separate records monitoring these matters were kept.

**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

At the last inspection a requirement was made for the Agency "To establish a procedure for monitoring the educational attainment, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents". This had been done.

Foster carers described, and children confirmed, the ways in which they involve themselves in the education of their foster children e.g. homework and visits to schools and demonstrated a clear commitment to promoting and meeting the educational needs of the children in their care.

**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?**

2

At the last inspection a recommendation was made for the Agency "To provide foster carers with training appropriate to meet the demands of the standard". Steps had been taken to address this issue and a training course had been devised. The training had not yet been delivered to those carers where it had been identified as being appropriate to meet the needs of the children placed.

Where the Inspector met with older young people they provided examples of ways in which they had been encouraged and supported in gaining more independence.

## 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?

4

At the last inspection a requirement was made for the Agency "To ensure staff files contain the information needed to comply with Schedule 1". This had been done. The quality of the organisation of the six files seen had been greatly improved upon since the last inspection.

Written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff in accordance with regulation and good practice were in place. Four new staff commenced employment in the last year. Files and discussions with new staff confirmed the Agency had followed its recruitment process. Additionally, the Inspector found both prospective carers and staff were consulted and involved in the recruitment process in a positive and inclusive way that the Inspector considered was in excess of the standard.

Total number of staff of the agency:

18

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

1

### 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?

3

The Inspector spoke individually with all of the care staff bar one and the administration workers as a group. All of the staff spoken with expressed their satisfaction with the ways in which the Agency is managed and confirmed there was an enabling management structure with clearly stated lines of accountability. All of the staff seen by the Inspector stated they had regular, formal supervision sessions where workloads were monitored and that informal supervision was available as and when needed. Records of supervision were up to date and provided evidence to support the views of workers. Regular staff meetings were held and minuted. Link Workers and senior staff felt well supported and assisted by the team of administrators. All staff had appropriate job descriptions and conditions of employment. Copies of these were contained in staff files.

<b>Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)</b> <b>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.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>The Agency employs a Manager, Service Manager, five Link Workers (fostering service social workers), a Referrals Co-ordinator and six administrative personnel including two dealing with financial matters. Four workers are employed to deal with matters associated with a 'Daytime Centre' run by the Agency. The allocated caseloads of Link Workers differed according to experience and length of service with the Agency e.g. two newly appointed staff were only supporting five families between them at the time of the inspection. Other workers had caseloads in line with Fostering Network recommendations. Records and positive reports from meetings with carers confirmed workers provide regular telephone contact and support visits of at least once a month. Carers were assessed and approved in a thorough and appropriate way.</p>		

<b>Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)</b> <b>The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>At the last inspection a recommendation was made for the Agency "To establish a whistleblowing policy that is made known to all staff and carers". In interviews with both staff and carers they confirmed their knowledge and understanding of this policy. All reported an open and enabling organisation in which they would feel able to 'whistleblow' if needed.</p> <p>The Agency had provided handbooks to both staff and carers that contained the Agency's policy, procedures and guidance. These included matters of health and safety. An out of hours support service was available to carers. Sufficient insurance cover was in place and displayed.</p>		

<b>Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)</b> <b>There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>At the last inspection a recommendation was made for the Agency "To ensure that staff are kept informed of changes in any legislation or guidance that are relevant to their jobs". After speaking with staff both individually and as a group, the Inspector was satisfied the Agency had taken appropriate action to address this issue. The Inspector was provided with evidence of the training opportunities available to staff. All staff employed for more than a year had received annual appraisals. Whilst the Inspector found evidence of these contributing to the identification of staff training needs and of the Agency taking an active approach to providing and supporting staff in attending training appropriate to their roles, he reached this view primarily from discussions rather than any clearly laid-out training plan or matrix that was assisted or informed by individual training profiles.</p>		

<b>Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)</b>		
<b>All staff are properly accountable and supported.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Staff demonstrated a clear understanding and awareness of their roles and responsibilities and whom they were responsible to. Each worker had a job description.</p> <p>As stated, evidence was seen of annual appraisals and of staff attending regular supervision sessions and staff meetings. Staff confirmed they found these forums helpful and productive and the Agency very supportive not only in their work but also in personal situations.</p>		

<b>Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)</b>		
<b>The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>The Agency had done work to develop a clearer strategy to meet NMS21.2, which included looking at the ways in which Link Workers distinguish between support and supervision visits. The Inspector concluded the Agency had addressed the matters set out in this criterion.</p> <p>Carers provided a positive view of the level of support offered by their Link Workers and the Agency.</p> <p>Substantial evidence of consistent communications between carers, Link Workers and children's social workers was found in children's files. Placing Officers confirmed the Agency kept them well informed of events concerning any children they had placed through the Agency.</p>		

<b>Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)</b>		
<b>The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>The Agency employs five Link Workers who support and supervise thirty-two carers through visits, phone calls and support meetings. Records provided evidence of workers meeting regularly with foster carers. As stated in the previous standard, the Agency had looked at the ways in which Link Workers distinguish between support and supervision visits. However, whilst the Inspector noted a marked improvement in this regard it was agreed there was a need to further develop the Agency's practice and to look at ways of improving upon how this is recorded and feeds into annual reviews.</p> <p>The Foster Care Agreements looked at met the requirements of Schedule 5. Carers had access to an out of hours support service and were provided with the opportunity to attend regular support groups. Carers confirmed they were paid promptly and received respite care when needed.</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?**

2

At the last inspection a requirement was made for the Agency "To ensure carers are provided with the necessary training to meet the needs of each child placed". The Inspector was provided with a copy of the Agency's rolling programme of training that covered a broad range of training opportunities including NVQ Level III. Carers spoken with provided a positive view of the training they had attended. From discussions with staff and carers the Inspector gained the view the Agency places great importance upon providing carers with relevant and appropriate training opportunities. However, since no individual appraisals, training profiles or assessments of foster carers training needs to meet the needs of children placed were available the Inspector was unable to sufficiently evidence whether the regulation was being met in full. The requirement is therefore repeated.

## 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

At the last inspection the Inspector made comment that the quality of file keeping could be improved upon. The Inspector looked at four children's files; these were divided into sections and it was noted there was a noticeable improvement in the quality of both the ways in which they ordered and the content of entries. Although the Inspector noted some files contained both gaps and poor quality of entries these were identified as relating, the Inspector discovered, to a member of staff who had since left the Agency. The Service Manager was aware of this shortfall and the Inspector was satisfied the situation had been addressed.

Foster carers' records were stored in secure places and their diaries were up to date.

### 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?

3

The last inspection found little evidence of children being involved in contributing to their records and confusion as whom the records belonged to. A recommendation to conduct a review in this regard had been done and training in report writing had been provided. Foster carers demonstrated a clearer understanding of their responsibilities and although the Inspector found there was some evidence of involving children in their records this could be improved upon.

Records were stored securely. The Inspector looked at six foster carers' files, six staff files and administrative records e.g. Child Register, Register of Foster Parents. These were well ordered and maintained and kept in accordance with regulations.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

58

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

68

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

41

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

5

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

6

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

315

Maximum £

375

## 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?**

3

The Agency had large office premises set in a rural position about three miles from Faversham, Kent. The facilities for the secure retention of records and the measures to safeguard IT systems were found to be satisfactory. The premises were protected by an appropriate security system. The building and its contents were adequately insured.

## 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 Inspector was provided with financial information and spoke with the Finance Manager. The organisation was financially viable and had appropriate strategies and procedures in place to deal with situations of financial crisis. The Agency conformed with regulations and guidelines imposed upon businesses i.e. PAYE and National Insurance.

### 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?

3

The Agency employs two people to deal with financial matters and the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the financial processes i.e. the billing of responsible authorities and the payment of carers. These workers were line-managed by the Service Manager.

Accounts were maintained and audited by an external company.

**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

As was found at the last inspection the foster carers spoken to confirmed they receive their payments on time and have never had cause for complaint in this respect.

The foster carers' manual contained the arrangements for the payment of allowances and expenses.

## 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?	0
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Due to cancellation for reasons of bad weather, the Inspector was unable to attend and observe a meeting of the Agency's fostering panel. It was not possible therefore to inspect this standard in full.

However, the Inspector did have opportunity to speak with the Chair of the Fostering Panel. This was the Service Manager who assumes this role under Regulation 24 (2)(a). The Inspector was satisfied panel members were appropriately recruited and consisted of people from a range of professional backgrounds and experience as per regulations. This included a foster carer and a person who had been fostered.

Written policy and procedures had been established for the use of the Fostering 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?	9
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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Not applicable.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

Not 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 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> January 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

I am, on the whole, very pleased with the results of this inspection. I believe the report reflects the efforts made by staff and carers this year to improve our practice and to enhance our overall service.

In relation to your finding in Standard 8, you have commented on how this was a difference in the interpretation of the Standard and not a deliberate disrespect of the Standard. We have conducted an internal audit on all placements and will remain fully compliant to this Standard. I have organised a quarterly independent auditing process of this as well.

In relation to providing Restraint training, we have now booked this with a provider called Pro Act. The first dates of this four-day course are in June and July.

We have amended the Children's Guide to include a clearer explanation on how a child can access an independent person if needed. We are additionally considering developing information for a looked after child through tapes, videos and CDs.

In relation to the comments in Standard 7, we have identified a trainer to facilitate our Equal Opportunities and Diversity training. This, in addition to our Class Divided course, should evidence a committed stance to providing staff and carers with a clear understanding of the needs of children from minority ethnic groups.

Our preparation for Adulthood training is now organised, provided by an independent trainer and one of our most experienced carers. We are confident this course, coupled with current practices, will ensure staff and foster carers fully understand the issues for young people who are facing the dilemmas of adulthood.

We have organised staff and carers' training portfolios and will be delivering these to carers through supervision groups.

In relation to your feedback regarding providing further evidence that carers work within the given frameworks and that we further review the delivery of support and structured supervision; this process has begun.

Overall, I feel the report offers fair and reasonable comments which we will take forward as an agency. I am especially pleased that the efforts made from last year are reflected in the report as we look forward to another exciting year.

Maureen Ward  
Registered Provider

**Action taken by the NCSC 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 26<sup>th</sup> March 2004, 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 NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC 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, Maureen Ward 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**                      Maureen Ward  
**Signature**                      M Ward  
**Designation**                    Registered Provider  
**Date**                              31.03.04.

**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.