



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Fostering Matters Ltd

**3 College Green
Gloucester
GL1 2LR**

Lead Inspector
Diana
Waters

Announced
12 September 2005 10:00

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

Reader Information

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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	Fostering Matters Ltd
Address	3 College Green Gloucester GL1 2LR
Telephone number	01452 309210
Fax number	01452 304703
Email address	fosteringmatters@btconnect.com
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Fostering Matters Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Michael Castledine
Type of registration	IFA - Independent Fostering Agency
No. of places registered (if applicable)	N/A
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	N/A

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

None.

Date of last inspection July 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

FosteringMatters is an Independent Fostering Agency providing a family placement service for children and young people. They were inspected in July 2004, prior to being operational. The second inspection was in Sept 2005. Fostering Matters have a registered responsible individual and manager who are both social work qualified; they currently assess, train and support foster carers. The agency provides a 24hr on call support service to the carers and to local authorities seeking placements. An administrator has been in post since Oct 2004. The agency's Foster Care Panel has been operational from Sept 2004. During the inspection in Sept 2005, the agency had 20 sets of approved carers and 24 children in placement, including siblings. The agency covers a geographical area which has a radius not exceeding 1.5 - 2 hours travelling distance from the office base in Gloucester (with the exception of one carer). Children in placement came from 10 Local Authority areas.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place over a three-week period in September. Interviews were held with the registered manager and one member of staff. A range of documentation was looked at, including a sample of children's case records and staff recruitment records. The inspector visited four foster homes with a total of 8 children/young people in placement. Seven fostered young people were seen and the inspector was shown their bedrooms, some provided information about carers and the agency, and the younger children were observed.

6 placing officers, 9 foster carers and 0 young people (aged 8 and over) returned completed questionnaires.

At this inspection the inspector observed foster care panel, but not pre approval training and did not meet groups of carers or children.

What the service does well:

The service recruits and assesses carers well. The Panel process was observed to be comprehensive.

The fostering service supports carers and placements well and carers facilitate and understand the importance of young people's contact with their families. Carers reported feeling valued by the agency.

The child protection knowledge of the workers was extensive and work with placing social workers was reported to be positive.

The agency recruits carers who are able to integrate young people into the carers' families and extended networks. Young people positively commented on the individual families.

Carers were commended for recording significant life events and everyday matters with memory boxes and "this is your life" photo albums for young people whilst in foster care.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency was inspected in July 2004, as the agency was non operational at this time there were a large number of areas the inspectors were unable to fully assess.

What they could do better:

The service needs to improve its recruitment and vetting process for all staff, ensuring application forms are completed, references documented and relevant information on all staff should be held in the agency office. Post-approval training for carers is limited to local courses and needs development.

Training for staff also needs development.

Comprehensive information about children in placement is needed from placing authorities.

Supervision and support of carers and staff needs recording consistently.

Safe caring policies for families and individual children need further training and development.

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 outcomes for standard(s) 12

The service supports the health and development of children and young people in placement.

EVIDENCE:

All except one of the young people tracked were registered with local doctors and dentists. Carers reported arranging necessary medical intervention, and recording supported this assertion. There were limited medical histories from the placing authorities on most files of the tracked young people.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3,6,8,9and15

On the whole, the service makes suitable arrangements for the protection of children and young people. Further improvements as detailed below would enhance the service.

EVIDENCE:

Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau clearance is held on both the responsible individual and the manager and both have been satisfactorily interviewed as fit persons by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in July 2004 as part of the registration process. This process involves C.S.C.I satisfactorily verifying Schedule 1 information. This information must also be held in the agency office. Additionally, telephone enquiries should be made to follow up written references on staff employed by the agency and, as far as practicable, verification should be obtained and retained on file explaining why employment with children/vulnerable adults ended for staff employed (Schedule 1.4).

Carers are currently assessed by qualified social workers using the BAAF F format and the competency based element. This assessment is submitted to Foster Care Panel to make recommendations about the carers' suitability to foster to the Director of Fostering Matters.

Health and safety questionnaires are conducted as part of this assessment and include checking car safety, pets and guns. All children seen had individual rooms with the exception of two young siblings. Risk assessments are needed on individual features in foster homes, such as trampolines and window fire escapes.

Out of the 8 young people tracked, 5 were emergency placements and 3 (who were siblings) had been placed prior to 2004. Evidence exists that the agency turned down a considerable amount of inappropriate referrals and unsuitable placements. Whilst the agency gives careful consideration to the carers' abilities to meet the needs of young people, information on young people (both prior to admission and subsequently) from the placing authorities was minimal. Carers confirmed they had received the information the agency had received and were not pressurised to accept inappropriate placements. Some carers confirmed receiving additional information through discussion with the placing social worker.

There was no evidence of written foster placement agreements, which identified the additional support needed by young person or/and carer to compensate for the gaps in match between carer and young person. Carers confirmed receiving support from the agency, in one case providing domestic support, although insufficient respite in one case was also identified as a support shortfall.

There was no evidence of young people being introduced to their foster carers prior to admission, although at the time of the inspection the transfer of one youngster to new carers had been carefully planned and introductions were in progress.

The agency has a comprehensive child protection policy and it is made clear that carers must not administer physical punishment.

Systems are in place to monitor and collate information on child abuse allegations.

Appropriate child protection training is reported to be provided during the pre-approval training for carers, but the agency needs to continue to update carers training following their approval.

The inspectors recommended at the last inspection that each foster home has a safe care policy for their household/ family prior to their approval and that this is then reviewed with each young person placed. These policies were at the time of this inspection being completed by carers, and had not been discussed/agreed with the children's social workers. There were, however, in two cases tracked evidence of clear discussions with the placing social worker, carers and agency about appropriate strategies to ensure individual children's safety.

The agency recognises bullying as an issue for young people and has produced an anti-bullying policy.

The agency also has a clear written procedure to be followed for children missing from placements.

Two young people tracked were concerned their placing authorities may make them leave their placements against their wishes, and had been given access to helpful telephone numbers to access an advocate. Young people's guides were present in the foster homes, but not all the children placed had accessed them and the inspector recommends that all young people placed (of sufficient age and understanding) be given their own copy of the guide.

The agency's two social work staff have the relevant qualifications, experience and knowledge to work with, safeguard and promote the welfare of young people and the inspector recognises their considerable child protection experience. Some clarity is needed on the procedure for recruiting and /or funding sessional/teaching posts and adherence to the agency policy for the recruitment of staff is required. The relevant records relating to existing staff recruited also need to be retained in the agency office.

At the last inspection, the agency reported that all Panel members had applied for CRB clearance and at the time of this inspection all except one member of panel had received this.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 7,13

The service actively promotes foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

The service supports educational achievement and gives young people confidence in themselves.

EVIDENCE:

One young person tracked was in a placement that provided evidence of understanding and respect for their religion and culture: efforts had been made to provide translation, and additionally the field social worker was able to speak the young persons first language. Carers interviewed showed awareness and sensitivity to dietary requirements.

Children tracked confirmed they were encouraged to pursue and participate in a range of community activities.

The service actively recruits carers from a wide range of backgrounds, which include: single, married and unmarried couples, same gender carers, and carers with a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Two school age young people tracked were not in education. This inspection took place in early September and both had been admitted during the school summer holidays , carers presented evidence of their attempts to locate suitable education, but difficulties between local education departments and placing authorities had caused time delays. Arrangements for the young people not in education included little structured education or occupation and whilst for the two young people tracked this did not jeopardise their placements, it is an area the agency should address in consultation with the placing authorities.

Language support was provided to one young person whose first language was not English.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 10,11

Children and young people are enabled to keep in touch with their families and the agency promotes their contact arrangements.

Consultation with young people in placement takes place through individual workers. This could be improved by introducing more formal systems for consultation that would enable children to provide more feedback about the service.

EVIDENCE:

In the foster homes visited there was evidence that carers promoted family contact as appropriate and that parents, grandparents, social workers, carers and the fostering agency were seen to all work effectively together. Contact and the importance of appropriate contact are covered in carers' pre approval training and the understanding of the issue was evident from all carers interviewed.

Children and young people confirmed that the fostering agency social worker sometimes see them in placement and the carers regularly ask their views. However, there is no evidence that the agency routinely consult young people about the general running of the service and there are currently no groups for fostered young people. Some young people had accessed the children's guide, but others had not seen it and therefore did not readily have the relevant information should they wish to raise concerns or complain. Carers confirmed they had received the children's guide within their "box of information" from the agency.

Young people interviewed indicated that carers listened to them and encouraged them to have a voice at their reviews. At least two young people tracked were concerned they were going to be removed from their placements by their placing authority. One had spoken to the "Voice of the child in care" and another had contact with their children's rights officer. Three young people said how they "were treated as a member of the family": they were involved in nuclear and wider family activities and the outcomes for these young people were good. One young person gave permission to the inspector to quote: "Out of 9 foster homes, this is the best one I have been in, they are laid back and I am treated as a member of the family, I'm trusted and if I breach that trust I have to earn it back... I want to stay."

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 29

Payments were made to carers as agreed and specified by the agency.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a written policy on payments to carers, which includes a clear breakdown of fees and allowances. It carefully defines the expectation of the agency in respect of the allowances for caring for young people, which is helpful without being prescriptive. The agency states that each carer will receive a yearly breakdown of payments received and carers are to be paid fortnightly, directly into their bank accounts.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 cares are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 17,21,23 24

The fostering agency is staffed with experienced and qualified staff who ensure that carers are well supported. The service has grown quickly within the first year and is currently only adequately staffed, with the social work staff receiving little respite from the demands of the service.

There is a clear recruitment, assessment and training process for prospective carers.

Ongoing records on carers and children vary widely in quality.

EVIDENCE:

Both of the agency's social workers are experienced and qualified. The Agency's first year of business has concentrated on building up a carer network and supporting placements. The agency has recognised the need to employ additional staff and an additional experienced social worker has been recruited to commence work in November 2005. The agency's administrator commenced work in November 2004 and has been trained on the job.

Staff training, terms and conditions of service and personnel issues need addressing as the service grows and supervision needs to be documented for all staff and carers.

The process for assessing carers' qualities, competencies and aptitude for fostering follow the recognised BAAF F format. For this inspection, the fostering panel was observed, the Chair of Panel interviewed and panel minutes read, from which the inspector can confirm that the assessment process was followed. This process would be further enhanced by the applicant's attendance at panel. The Chair of Panel is a very experienced practitioner in both adoption and fostering.

All carers have a named worker who regularly visits, supports and supervises them. The supervision notes vary in quality and carers do not receive a copy as stated in the agency statement of purpose.

Information, advice and 24-hour support from the service were praised both by the carers tracked and in questionnaires returned.

Training, support groups for carers and respite care are all areas that need development. First annual reviews are only now becoming due and must return to panel. One carer had returned to Panel after six months as designated at their approval.

There was clear evidence in several cases tracked of the agency working closely in partnership with the placing social workers, from whom comments included "foster carers/agency and social workers have worked as a team and this has proved invaluable".

Training for carers up to their approval is well established and each carer is expected to attend the pre-approval course. Ongoing training, however, needs developing and the needs of carers' children should be addressed. Annual reviews are due in the coming months and unannounced visits are part of this process.

Children's case records vary considerably. All carers confirmed they kept diaries/log books. The agency's statement of purpose requires a monthly report to forward to the placing authority, but carers recording was only seen on 2 out of the 5 files inspected.

Some files contained the required LAC documentation from the placing authority but many did not and evidence from the agency requesting this information was not easily found. It is therefore recommended that the agency introduces a system that keeps track of information requested and received and issues reminders where necessary.

In one foster placement case tracked, "This is your life" photo albums were given to young people at the conclusion of their placements. These and memory boxes seen at another home are excellent examples of memorabilia kept for children by carers. These examples of good practice are commended and should be shared throughout the agency.

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	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	2
9	2
15	x
30	x

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

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

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	3/17	20/21	The Fostering Service Provider must ensure that all components of regulations 20 and 21 are fulfilled	Dec 05
2.		4	The service must ensure that all young people have a copy of the childrens guide	Dec 05
3.				

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	15	Telephone enquiries should be made and documented in addition to written references recieved as part of staff recruitment.
2.	6	Risk assessments for carers accomodation and gardens should be documented
3.	8	The agency should ensure that for each child placed, carers have a background history, a written foster placement agreement identifying any additional support needed.
4.	9	The agency should ensure that each foster home has a safe care policy for their household and family prior to approval and that this is reviewed with each young person placed.

5.	13	The agency should make clear the arrangements to be put in place if a young person is not in school, including structured occupation.
6.	17	The service should continue to ensure that there are sufficient staff to run the fostering service as it grows.
7.	21	The agency should ensure the consistent recording of supervision of both staff and carers.
8.	23	The service should develop a post approval training programme for both carers and staff, and further develop support networks amongst carers and consider specific support for carers children
9.	24/12	The service should ensure case records kept on young people adhere to the agencies policies and should ensure that young peoples background histories, including medical histories are sought from placing authorities.
10.	11	Develop formal systems to ensure that the opinions and views of children are sought on all matters affecting them

Commission for Social Care Inspection

1210 Lansdowne Court
Gloucester Business Park
Brockworth
Gloucester
GL3 4AB

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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