



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Children First Fostering Agency Ltd

Suites 4 and 5

2nd Floor, Warren House

10 - 20 Main Road

Hockley

Essex

SS5 4QS

7th March 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Children First Fostering Agency Ltd

Tel No

01702 208520

Address

Suites 4 and 5, 2nd Floor, Warren House, 10 - 20 Main Road, Hockley, Essex, SS5 4QS

Fax No

01702 208529

Email Address

Children-first@cffa.co.uk

Registered Number of IFA

I060000237

Name of Registered Provider

Children First Fostering Agency Ltd

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Mr Woodrow Lloyd Clachar

Date of first registration

2nd July 2003

Date of latest registration certificate

2nd July 2003

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

24/02/04

Date of Inspection Visit		7th March 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Nicola Welch	133460
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr. Woody Clachar, Ms. Lynsey Clachar	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

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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

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

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

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Children First Fostering Agency is an independent fostering agency with limited company status.

The agency was established in April 1999 and aims to provide fostering placements for children and young people within the age range of birth to 18 years of age.

The agency is fully committed to providing a multi-cultural service and has recruited foster carers from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In particular, the agency has specific expertise with regards to caring for children from an African and Afro-Caribbean background.

Approximately 50% of its carers are of African and African-Caribbean background while the other 50% are made up of white UK and others

The agency assess each child's needs against the carers ability to meet these needs and only offer placements where an appropriate match can be made.

The agency arranges long term, short term, and respite, bridging, emergency and parent and child placements.

Children First are centrally managed from its head office in Essex and provide local offices to support carers in the London and Luton areas. The Agency states it is able to provide care for children throughout the United Kingdom.

At the time of the inspection, the agency employed 32 foster carer families and there were 48 children placed.

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.)

All standards were inspected at this inspection and elements of each standard reviewed. Records policies and procedures have only been sampled. At future inspections other issues may come to light when different items are sampled or different people spoken to.

The registered provider and registered manager are both well qualified and experienced childcare practitioners. Both work in a very child-centred way and this is reflected in the name of the agency.

The agency aims to achieve excellence in all areas of practice and to meet, if not exceed, national minimum standards. Throughout the inspection, there was evidence of staff commitment to maintaining and developing a good quality service.

During the inspection process, files of three foster families and the children placed with them were examined for case tracking purposes. Visits to the three families homes were made. In addition, the Inspector had the opportunity of attending and meeting with the carers support group, attending a training session for prospective carers, meeting with a number of the agency staff and observing and interviewing the fostering panel. Questionnaires were also sent to children, carers and placing authority social workers.

The philosophy of the agency is clearly reflected in their title – Children First. Throughout the inspection, there was significant evidence that the agency aimed to ensure that the standards they provided were of the highest quality with the child the centre of the focus.

At this inspection, all 30 standards of the 30 standards assessed were met. Many exceeded the standard required and demonstrated commendable practice.

There was significant evidence that the agency is very well managed and that there are excellent support systems in place for both staff and carers. Carers stated that the agency were both swift and responsive with regards to responding to calls they made.

Significant thought is given to the appropriate matching of children with their foster carers. This was evidenced through the very thorough Form F assessments undertaken on all new foster carers. The agency is fully committed to the provision of a multi-cultural service where issues of diversity are considered throughout the matching and placement process.

With regards to the educational needs of the children, the agency clearly places a high priority with regards to ensuring that these needs are addressed. The Education Advisor has a clearly defined role that is considered by many of the carers as being invaluable. Of the 48 children placed, 46 children have educational placements, one is in receipt of home

tuition following their exclusion and one is in the process of appeal.

The agency has also given much thought into the provision of high quality training for both staff and carers. Many carers spoken with indicated that the calibre of training provided by the agency was excellent. Certainly, the Inspector had the opportunity of observing a session for prospective carers and was impressed by both the content and delivery. Additionally, the agency is currently in the process of supporting and sponsoring a new on-line training course for carers, which has been designed and accredited by Edexcel and will lead to a B Tech level 3 and 4 Qualification for foster carers. Ten of the Children First carers have been enrolled and are due to commence the course in April 2005.

The fostering panel was observed and the Chair and Vice Chair were interviewed. The panel demonstrated a rigorous assessment of the Form F presented to them in relation to a prospective carer. In addition, a carer whose practice had been questioned was given the opportunity to put forward her views on the situation. Whilst she was afforded both empathy and sensitivity throughout the process, ultimately, the needs of the children placed with her were given paramount consideration and the agency chose to de-register her.

Following this inspection, there were no statutory requirements made and just one recommendation the agency may wish to consider.

Finally, the Inspector would like to take the opportunity to thank the Directors, staff, carers, children and young people for all their assistance and contributions to this inspection.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector _____
Second Inspector _____
Regulation Manager _____
Date _____

Signature _____
Signature _____
Signature _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	

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	FS21	It is recommended that the agency ensure that their terms and conditions and foster carer agreements make explicit that respite care is not considered appropriate for long-term placements unless under exceptional circumstances.

* 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	6
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)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	7/3/05
Time of Inspection	11.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	35

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Standard met.

The agency has a Statement of Purpose that contains all the required information as in accordance with Regulation 3. Written information provided to carers and placing authorities is clear and well presented. The Statement of Purpose is also summarised in the Children's Guide.

The Children's Guide is informative and clearly presented for the older child. I understand from the manager that a guide for the younger child is currently being developed. Younger children spoken with during the inspection commented that they found the current format a "bit too grown up for them".

Responses from the children's questionnaires and children spoke with evidenced that it is practice to ensure that all children placed are given a Children's Guide. For the younger child, the foster carer and/or supervising social worker will explain the contents in an age appropriate manner.

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?
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	4
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Standard exceeded.

The agency is both managed and provided for by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively. The manager holds the CQSW, a Certificate in Community and Youth Work and an MA Social Sciences Degree. Mr. Clachar also has significant experience of working as a local authority social worker. His Co-Director, Ms. Lynsey Clachar holds the DPSW, MA degree and a Psychology degree.

Through discussion and survey, staff, carers, children and young people describe the management structure as being approachable, open and supportive.

Both Mr. Clachar and Ms. Clachar, were observed to be involved in the day-to-day functions of the agency and very knowledgeable with regards to individual children and carers.

The manager demonstrated strong leadership skills, particularly in relation to the delivery of the best outcomes for children placed with the agency.

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?
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	3
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Standard met.

As part of the registration process, full checks, including CRB's, references etc as in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 were undertaken on both Mr. and Ms. Clachar. Both underwent the full "fit Person" process and were considered to be suitable people to be carry on and manage the fostering service.

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

Standard met.

There are very clear lines of accountability between the manager, staff and carers.

The agency employs a Financial Controller who ensures that there are correct financial procedures in place. The Inspector was shown copies of financial accounts and statements that evidenced that the company is financially viable.

Carers are provided with a breakdown of what the allowances they receive for each child should be spent on. This includes an amount for clothing, pocket money, savings etc. In discussion with foster carers, the supervising social workers undertake spot checks on these records and the children's savings accounts to ensure that money is appropriately accounted for. I understand from the manager that this has highlighted discrepancy and poor practice with one carer, and led to the carer being referred back to panel.

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

0

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.

0

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

1

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Standard met.

The manager has a clear job description, which specifies his duties and responsibilities. The level of delegation and lines of accountability are clearly defined and known by staff. In the manager's absence, his Co Director takes on the responsibility.

Staff, foster carers and children spoken with were all familiar with the registered manager. His commitment to the children is evidenced by his attendance at meetings, reviews, training events etc. He is clearly very child focussed and is thought of very highly by many. One young person told the Inspector that "Woody was her hero", when asked for what reason, she replied "because he found this lovely family for me".

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Standard met.</p> <p>During the inspection, the homes of three foster carers were visited. All were warm, clean, comfortably furnished and well decorated. Some of the children showed the Inspector their rooms, which were found to be decorated to their choice and personalised.</p> <p>Annual household reviews are undertaken and the home and immediate environment are checked to ensure that they are free of avoidable hazards that might expose the children to risk of injury or harm.</p> <p>All carers receive health and safety training.</p>		

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?	4
<p>Standard exceeded.</p> <p>The agency is fully committed to providing a multi-cultural service. They cater for all children, irrespective of their race, colour, creed, religion or other forms of diversity. In order to do so, they have been successful in recruiting foster carers from a number of different racial origins and backgrounds.</p> <p>Foster carers visited were seen to encourage the children to pursue hobbies and interests as a means to enhancing their self esteem. Children visited were enthusiastic about the various activities and leisure pursuits they attended.</p>		

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?**

4

Standard exceeded.

The agency endeavours to ensure that the children are appropriately matched with carers capable of meeting the child's assessed needs. The agency prides itself in their ability to place high priority with regards to ensuring the child's assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs are matched as closely as possible to carers with the same ethnic origin, race, religion and culture of the foster family. In particular, one family visited had been positively matched with children of a dual heritage. The placement had been able to ensure that the children were able to gain a better sense of the black part of their cultural identity.

The agency also strives to ensure that whenever possible, the child has a planned introduction to the foster carers. This includes introductory visits, and overnight stays, before the actual placement takes place. The children's views are taken into account with regards to how the visit had been for them. One carer visited spoke of "an excellent introduction with her foster child". The child had 6 weekend visits before the placement commenced. She stated, "This is a model on how the placement should happen!"

The Inspector was given statistics for the month of February, during this period, 47 referrals were made to the agency, and of this number 5 children were appropriately matched and placed accordingly.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Standard met.

All foster carers receive Child Protection Training, recognising signs of abuse and on safe caring skills. A number of the male foster carers interviewed during the inspection process had also attended training specific for males. All had stated how beneficial they had found this as it had heightened their awareness with regards to not placing themselves in situations where they might be at risk of allegations.

The agency makes it very clear to all carers that corporal punishment is totally unacceptable. 15 children completed and returned their questionnaires. All of the children stated that they felt that the punishments they received from carers of Children First Agency were appropriate.

The agency provides training and guidance in relation to anti-bullying.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%
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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?	3
Standard met.		
<p>The agency promotes contact between foster children, their families and friends where appropriate. The responsibility for making decisions about contact lies with the placing authority, subject to any court order in force.</p> <p>Arrangements for contact were evidenced on files seen and from discussion with both children and carers. Some children stated in their returned questionnaires that they would like for more contact with family and siblings, although as previously stated, decisions on frequency etc. lies with the placing authority and or court, not the agency.</p>		

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?	4
Standard exceeded.		
<p>Children First Agency considers every child as being “special”. Every child is encouraged to express their views to carers, social workers, agency staff and the managers. One child spoken with during the inspection confirmed that they would often either visit the agency premises or telephone the Director of the agency directly, to discuss issues.</p> <p>Of the 15 returned questionnaires from children, 11 stated that their foster carers often asked for their opinions and ideas, 3 stated “they sometimes did”, and one said “they didn’t” – then went on to list a number of things that had changed because of what they had said!!</p> <p>Children and young people are given information with regards to how to access the complaints procedure. Children and young people spoken with during the inspection confirmed that they knew whom they could make representation to if unhappy.</p> <p>Files examined during inspection evidenced that the children and young people’s views were sought at statutory reviews and also when they were seen by their social workers.</p> <p>During the inspection process, one child made it very clear that she was unhappy with the decision the local authority had made with regards to her future placement. Consequently, the fostering agency were extremely proactive in ensuring that the child had access to an independent Advocacy Service, Children’s Rights Officer and Children’s Legal Service representative in order to facilitate her views and wishes being appropriately listened to.</p>		

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

Standard met.

When the child is first placed with the agency, the child's health needs are fully discussed. Every child is registered with a local G.P., dentist and optician.

The agency also uses the services of the Looked After Children's Nurse for children placed within the Essex Social Services area. One child spoken with during the inspection receives regular visits from the nurse, who is able to advise on general health development, sexual health matters and substance misuse.

The agency is always reliant on the information that the local authority provides in relation to the children placed. It should be noted that often the agency experiences difficulty in obtaining all the necessary relevant information pertaining to the children.

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?**

4

Standard exceeded.

The agency employs a full time Education Adviser, who works closely with foster carers and schools in promoting the educational needs of the foster children. Foster carers spoken with confirmed that they attended school Open Evenings. The Education Advisor will check whether the local authority has a Personal Education Plan in place for all the children. In her experience, many local authorities do not take these seriously and it requires some input on her part in order to obtain these.

The Education Advisor will ensure that all of the children's educational records are kept up to date. She attends reviews whenever possible to ensure that educational needs are given a high priority.

The Education Advisor contacts schools and makes them aware of the child's "looked after" status. She also puts some pressure on the schools in order to ensure that a child has an appropriate educational placement within the recommended 20 days of placement.

She attends the carers support group when requested in order to advise on how to get a child a Statement of Special Educational Needs if appropriate. 4% of the general population have statements. Of the 46 children placed, 19 of the children have special educational needs. A number of the children placed with the agency are unaccompanied asylum seekers, thus English is not their first language.

Foster carers spoken with indicated that they have found her services extremely useful with

regards to support and advice in relation to all educational issues.

At the time of the inspection only two of the 48 children placed were without an educational placement. One child was excluded and in receipt of home tuition, the other child was in the process of going through an appeal.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Standard met.

The agency has a clear Leaving Care Policy and provides the carers training in relation to helping the children make the transition from foster carer to semi and fully independent living. Yet again the agency is reliant on the local authority for the development of the Pathway Plan.

One foster carer spoken with described how the children are encouraged to undertake age appropriate tasks within the home such as taking responsibility for keeping their bedrooms and belongings clean and tidy. She also went onto to say that she has maintained contact with a number of young people she had previously cared for, even though they are now living independently. One young person recently came to stay and recuperate for a week following a minor operation. This would indicate the commitment carers have towards the children placed.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Standard met.

The agency has clear policies and procedures in relation to the recruitment of safe and suitable people to work with the children and young people.

During inspection, three staff files were reviewed. All evidenced that they fully complied and were in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Since the last inspection, the agency has incorporated into their procedures follow up verbal telephone calls to referees.

Social work staff employed are appropriately qualified and those spoken with demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of the Children's Act, Working Together, and of the regulatory requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000.

Social workers involved in the assessment and approval of foster carers are qualified and have experience of working with children and foster carers.

Total number of staff of the agency:

13

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

3

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

Standard met.

The agency has a clear management structure and the lines of accountability are known by all those employed. Staff files viewed evidenced that supervision sessions were planned, regular and recorded. The files also evidenced that job descriptions, contracts and conditions of service had been provided.

Foster carer files viewed evidenced that assessments, approvals and reviews were managed and implemented effectively.

The administrative team appeared efficient and effective with regards to dealing with foster carers, prospective carers and referrals from local authorities. Staff were able to provide the Inspector with information readily which evidenced that effective systems to keep statistics were undertaken.

Foster carers spoken with were highly complimentary with regards to the response they received when they contacted the agency either personally or by telephone.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Standard met.

The agency employs an adequate number of experienced and qualified staff in order to ensure that they are able to provide a quality service. During the inspection, it was noted that the Directors were both involved in carrying caseloads when required.

The agency has a sound recruitment policy and strategy for recruiting a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Form F assessments were found to be of high and thorough standard. In discussion with the Panel Chair and Vice Chair, both of whom have significant experience of sitting on other panels, both stated that they felt that Children First assessments were exceptionally well documented and presented in terms of being able to assess the qualities, aptitudes and competencies of the carers.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

Standard exceeded.

The agency appears to be an exceptionally fair and competent employer who demands and rewards high standards of work from its employees. Staff receive generous holiday entitlement, private medical scheme membership, a company pension and discretionary staff bonuses when appropriate.

The health and safety policy for carers, children and staff is comprehensive.

The agency has public liability and professional indemnity insurance for all staff and carers.

In terms of support provided by the agency, the carer's questionnaires returned and carers spoken with all stated that the agency provided an excellent service. One carer stated "the support was available 24 x 7". Another described her link worker as "excellent!"

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Standard met.

Staff files indicated that induction training; probationary periods and annual appraisals are undertaken. The agency considers high calibre training is imperative and employs independent trainers who are renowned in the field of foster care. Training programmes for the staff and carers are regularly held and reflect the policies of the fostering service.

Staff spoken with evidenced that they are up to date in their knowledge and understanding of legislation relevant to their roles.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Standard met.

Staff spoken with indicated that they were aware of their roles and responsibilities expected of them and that they were familiar with the agency's policies and procedures.

Supervision is planned and regular and records of supervision and appraisals are kept. Any issues identified are promptly identified and addressed.

Staff have the opportunity of attending regular staff meetings.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Standard met.

The agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. All carers receive regular fortnightly visits from their supervising social workers, unlimited telephone contact and access to out of hours contact. The agency also provides premises for the carers to hold their own carers support group. Members of staff can be invited to these meetings should the carers wish.

The agency also provides an annual holiday for all carers and children, which the agency pays for. Respite care is also available for foster carers with short term or problematic placements. The agency does however hold a very strong commitment to the view that foster carers of children with long-term placements should include the children and young people in family holidays etc. Documentation provided evidenced that the agency has provided significant financial assistance to promote this commitment.

Nonetheless, one particular carer voiced a view to the Inspector that “they felt caring for children 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year, was exhausting” and that more respite should be provided. The Agency does make provision for short respite breaks, for long-term carers. For this reason carers are strongly encouraged to identify a good support network who may be able to assist with respite.

Given the agency’s commitment and focus on the child’s needs, it is therefore recommended that the agency ensures that their terms and conditions and foster carer’s agreement make the agency’s view explicit to the carers from the outset. This will then prevent any misunderstanding or misinterpretation by the carers.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****4**

Standard exceeded.

A named, appropriately qualified member of staff supervises all carers. Foster carer agreements on file evidenced that that the carers were clear in the understanding and expectations of the agency and/or local authority.

On approval, foster carers are provided with a handbook, which covers policies, procedures etc. legal information and insurance details.

As previously stated, the supervising social workers regularly meet with the carers. Files examined evidenced that recordings are made of these supervisory visits.

The agency is proactive in their policies and procedures to minimise the risk of allegations against carers. Specific training for safe care and training for men who foster has been provided for carers.

The agency is very committed to the development needs of the carers and has recently sponsored a group of foster carers in undertaking a new B Tech. qualification which is

authenticated by the Edexcel Examination Board and supported by BAAF.

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?

4

Standard exceeded.

The Inspector had the opportunity of attending the Choosing to Foster training and was extremely impressed by the content and delivery. Prospective carers were observed to fully participate in the experiential learning methods. The trainer then provided the agency with feedback on how the carers had received and understood the training. This information was considered at panel when the applicant was being considered for approval.

The agency is fully committed to training being delivered within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. However, it was noted in discussion with some carers that because a specific session entitled “diversity” had not been provided, there was a misconception that they had not received this training.

Training in “safe care” is provided and also training for “men who foster”. Two male carers spoken with stated how helpful they had found this.

Other carers spoken with stated that they had found the training “excellent!”

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Standard met.

The agency maintains comprehensive case records for each foster child placed with a foster carer. During inspection, 6 children's files were examined. All were found to contain information that was up to date, relevant and clear.

The agency is reliant on the local authority to provide all appropriate information pertaining to the child. It was noted on file that some authorities are not as efficient as others in ensuring the agency has the relevant information. For example, on one file, some review minutes were outstanding. However, the agency themselves took responsibility of taking notes at the review and there was written evidence that the outstanding materials had been requested.

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
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Standard met.

The agency maintains files and records are kept for staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations.

Confidential files and records are stored safely and securely in locked cabinets.

Files viewed evidenced that the written records were legible and distinguished between fact and fiction.

The agency has an "open policy" in relation to their case records and the children and young people can have access if required.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			48
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			48
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			35
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			8
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			4
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	350	Maximum £	540

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

Standard met.

The agency's office premises are appropriately equipped with the necessary resources and equipment to provide to an efficient delivery of service.

The premises have facilities for the secure retention of records in a lockable room. There are appropriate measures to safeguard IT systems and an appropriate security system.

The premises have adequate facilities to provide accommodation for carers support meetings, for training and for panel meetings. There would however be access difficulties for people using wheelchairs or with mobility problems, given the premises are situated on the second floor and there is no lift. Currently, this does not present a problem, however, the agency would make alternative arrangements, e.g. home visits, should this issue arise.

Evidence of appropriate insurances for the premises and contents were made available for the Inspector.

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

Standard met.

The agency employs a Financial Controller who ensures that the agency's finances are maintained effectively. This includes Income Tax and National Insurance. The Director's Report and financial accounts were made available to the Inspector, which evidenced that the agency was financially "sound".

Carers and staff spoken with indicated that they were always paid promptly.

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

Standard met.

As above, the Financial Controller ensures that the financial processes and systems of the agency are operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

The agency has a clear policy for the charging of fees and expenses for any additional services it is asked to provide, e.g. therapy.

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?

4

Standard exceeded.

Foster carers are paid a set fee, which is more than sufficient to meet the day-to-day needs of each foster child. The fee also includes various elements such as savings, pocket money, birthday money, travelling costs, telephone calls etc. Foster carers are made aware of what the breakdown should be and I am aware that supervising social workers will at times audit the accounts, thus ensuring that the foster child's allowance is appropriately accounted for. One foster carer spoken with said, "how helpful she had found this procedure".

This process also highlighted poor practice of a carer who had not been putting the child's savings into an account. The carer is no longer with the agency.

Details of expenses payable are published. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually. All carers spoken with stated that they were paid promptly.

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?

4

Standard exceeded.

The composition of the fostering panel meets with the requirements of Regulation 24, paragraph 5. Specifically, independent panel members consist of one of who is a child health practitioner, one who has expertise in education, one independent member is a foster carer and another was adopted. The Panel Chair has significant social work qualifications and experience.

The Inspector had the opportunity of observing a panel meeting and of speaking with both the Chair and the Vice Chair. On the day of the inspection the panel considered the approval of a newly assessed carer, considered two reviews then met with a carer whom the agency was considering de-registration.

The panel was observed to rigorously scrutinise the form F assessment in significant detail. The author of the report was in attendance and was able to clarify a minor issue, which was questioned.

In discussion with the Chair and Vice Chair, both of who have experience of sitting on other fostering panels, both commented on the exceptionally high quality of assessments, Children First undertake. Issues of diversity are considered throughout the process. Both stated that the presentation of the form F information from Children First was clear, accurate and congruent.

With regards to the carer who asked the panel to reconsider the agency's decision to de-register her, the panel Chair was observed to handle the very difficult issues sensitively. Nonetheless, it was made very clear that ultimately it was the agency's decision whether or not she was de-registered. On this occasion, the decision was upheld given that clearly, the children's needs were not put first.

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
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Standard 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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Standard not applicable.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 7th March 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 4th May 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

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

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of _____ 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 Mr Clachar
Signature _____
Designation Registered Manager
Date 13/05/05

Or

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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