



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Archway Care Ltd

**10 (b) Lower Courtyard
Hounslow Hall Estate
Newton Longville
Milton Keynes
MK17 0BU**

Lead Inspector
Mr Rob Smith

Announced Inspection
20th June 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Archway Care Ltd
Address	10 (b) Lower Courtyard Hounslow Hall Estate Newton Longville Milton Keynes MK17 0BU
Telephone number	01908 379400
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Archway Care Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Ernest Winston Waterton
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 14th June 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Archway Care is a small independent fostering agency based in the Milton Keynes area. The agency based on figures supplied for year end 31/03/06, supported 16 carer households providing placements for a potential maximum of 41 children. The agency primarily provided medium to long-term or permanent fostering placements for children placed by nearby or London local authorities. The agency's offices were located on the outskirts of the village of Newton Longville

The agency's fees at the time of this inspection visit ranged from £771.89 to £1157.85 per week, depending on whether placements were shared or single, and the complexity of needs to be met.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection comprised the following elements:

- analysis of pre-inspection data and quality self assessment information provided by the agency;
- analysis of questionnaires submitted by placing authorities, carers and young people in placement;
- interviews with the Director, registered manager and two social work staff and telephone interview with a member of sessional support staff;
- scrutiny of a sample of carer, child and central administrative records; and
- a meeting with a group of carers.

On the basis of received information and previous assessment of the good quality of services offered by the agency visits to carer households to speak directly with young people in placement were not undertaken on this occasion.

What the service does well:

The agency continues to provide an overall high quality of service that centres on the needs of children in placement.

Good attention is paid to keeping young people safe

The agency provides an excellent level of support, supervision and guidance for carers.

Good support is provided for young people's health, educational achievement and contact arrangements.

Staff are well supported and managed.

Records are maintained to a high standard

What has improved since the last inspection?

Improvements had been made to the minor shortfalls in notification arrangements to other agencies and aspects of central record-keeping noted at the last inspection.

Overall standards of record-keeping had improved.

Membership of the agency's panel had been brought into line with statutory expectations.

The social work staff team had been increased in size to help provide a more consistent approach to carer recruitment and family finding processes.

What they could do better:

The agency needs to relocate to premises that meet the needs of staff and carers more appropriately

The agency needs to develop more focused policy and guidance for carers on preparation of young people for adulthood

The agency needs to ensure that foster placement agreements are signed by all relevant parties, especially the carer(s) accepting the placement.

The agency needs to ensure that the contents of contact and log sheets in carer and children's files are fully printed out and that carer files consistently record the circumstances in which placements have terminated.

The agency needs to reinforce with placing authorities the need to ensure all aspects of LAC documentation are supplied and completed prior to placements commencing.

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 outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement was made using the available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering agency and its carers helped ensure the health and development of placed young people was appropriately promoted.

EVIDENCE:

Evidence was obtained from carer and young people's files, discussion with a group of carers, central agency records and from questionnaires received from carers, young people and placing authorities.

These sources of information confirmed that the agency sought to ensure good medical and health information was obtained prior to, or promptly after, placement and that good attention was paid in, liaison with placing authorities, to ensuring annual medical assessments were carried out where children were in agreement to this.

Records of carer supervision indicated good monitoring of day-to-day health care matters for placed children by agency staff. Accidents or significant health changes were recorded on carer and child files and notified to placing authorities. Central records were maintained of significant accidents.

Feedback from placing authorities indicated high satisfaction with the attention given to meeting health care needs. Training in first aid and child development formed part of initial and ongoing training programmes for carers.

Children's questionnaires indicated carers helped them with meeting day-to-day health care needs and by ensuring they ate healthily and undertook relevant levels of exercise and sport.

Where children's physical or mental health care needs warranted additional specialist input this was confirmed by carers to be put in place by the agency, in liaison with placing authorities. Examples were also noted where the agency had been prepared to provide its own funding for counselling support in the absence of input from placing authorities.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 & 30

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement was made using the available evidence including a visit to this service.

The persons carrying on the agency were judged to be fit.

Reliable systems were in place to ensure carer households were safe environments for young people.

Appropriate attention was paid to matching of placements with young people to maximise the likelihood of placement success and stability.

Good systems were in place to protect young people and minimise the likelihood of abuse occurring.

Agency recruitment procedures were thorough thereby helping to ensure only suitable people were appointed to work with young people.

The organisation and running of the panel contributed appropriately to the approval and monitoring of foster placements.

EVIDENCE:

The Director of the company was unchanged since the last inspection and continued to be deemed a fit person to carry out this role by CSCI. The registered manager was also unchanged and deemed to be fit.

Good attention was paid by means of initial and ongoing health and safety checks to ensure foster households were safe places for young people to stay. Evidence of these checks was seen on carer files. Staff spoken with confirmed that any bedroom sharing arrangements were subject to additional specific risk assessment and liaison with all placing authorities concerned. Training in health and safety matters was provided as part of initial and ongoing carer training programmes.

Initial carer assessments were undertaken largely by independent assessors appointed by the agency. A sample of recent assessments were seen and noted to cover relevant areas as laid in the regulations based on the standard British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) competency based assessment framework. Appropriate checks were being carried out on household members and evidence retained on file to that effect.

The sample of carer files seen confirmed that up to date foster carer agreements were in place reflecting current approval terms. Feedback from carers in questionnaires, and in person, confirmed the agency was careful to ensure appropriate matching between children and placements, taking into account not only basic approval terms but also the specific needs and circumstances of carer households and potential placements. To the credit of the agency this resulted in periods where placements in carer households remained unfilled due to an insistence on proper matching. A large number of the children were being placed on a long-term or permanent basis and therefore often went through placing authorities' own permanency panels for final approval of match and placement. Where viable in terms of timescales introductory visits and placement preparation was undertaken between carers and young people to ensure all parties could make an informed choice about placements going ahead.

Individual placement agreements were seen to be in place on young people's files seen during this inspection. These were usually based on the now outdated Looked After Children (LAC) documentation forms PP1 and PP2, used by local authorities. These covered the majority of areas expected under the standards and schedules, although areas of placement shortfall and measures taken to address this would perhaps benefit from greater clarification. It was also noted that some of the placement agreements were not actually signed by foster carers concerned. A recommendation has been made to address this.

Clear and thorough child protection procedures were in place and good written guidance on this area of practice was provided for staff and carers. Training on child protection and safe caring was a core element of initial and ongoing carer training. Individual safe caring plans were seen on files for young people. Feedback from placing authorities did not indicate any concerns in respect of the safety and welfare of young people.

Any emerging child protection concerns were promptly notified to relevant authorities including CSCI. Examination of records for one such recent incident confirmed the agency had acted promptly to ensure the initial safety of the child concerned was secured and had then ensured sensitive support was available to the young person to assist through the subsequent investigative process, with which the agency had fully cooperated.

Appropriate written guidance was in place around the management of children's behaviour and the management of matters such as bullying and unauthorised absences. No concerns were raised or noted in relation to these areas of child safety during the course of this inspection.

The agency was carrying out unannounced supervision visits to carers, which provided an additional safeguard with regard to the consistency and quality of care offered to children in placement. A number of records of these visits were seen on the sample of care files inspected.

The agency had an appropriate complaints procedure in place. The agency had been in receipt of series of complex complaints relating to the situation of one set of now former carers of which CSCI had been made aware. This had not yet been fully investigated by the agency, due to the need for clarification of a number of the issues with CSCI, but the Director assured the inspector these would now be addressed as fully as possible. It should be noted that the complaints centred on the management of the carers concerned by the agency and did not raise any concerns about the care of children.

No other concerns or complaints had been received by CSCI with regard to the agency since the last inspection.

A sample of staff recruitment files were checked during this inspection. This confirmed that all aspects of the standards and regulations were being adhered to and the agency is to be commended on the quality and organisation of its records relating to staff recruitment.

The fostering panel was not observed on this occasion as observation at the last inspection had not raised any concerns and the constitution of the panel was largely unchanged. Minutes of recent panel meetings were however checked and these confirmed that the panel was fulfilling its role of scrutiny of initial assessments and relevant household reviews in a thorough and appropriate manner. The last inspection had identified a technical anomaly in

that the sole director of the company was not listed as a panel member, as required by regulations, due to his then agency decision maker role. This had now been addressed with the decision-maker role having been taken on by an external person leaving the director free to join panel. The fostering panel had been in receipt of formal training since the last inspection on the national minimum standards and regulations governing fostering services.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

7 & 13

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement was made using the available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency placed a suitable emphasis in matter of diversity to ensure children's needs in this area were consistently met.

Good attention was paid by the agency to ensuring that children were able to achieve to their potential, educationally.

The agency did not offer short break care to parents; this key standard was therefore not inspected.

EVIDENCE:

The agency was developing an increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse range of carer households to offer a reasonable range of choice when trying to match children's ethnic and cultural needs. The agency staff team also comprised members from diverse backgrounds offering personal experience and knowledge of management of diversity needs and challenges.

As part of placement planning processes, matching children to carers of similar backgrounds was worked towards where feasible, and where not, additional advice and support offered to carers to ensure all areas of need were met. Examples were seen on carer and child files and in feedback from young people where carers had taken particular effort to ensure appropriate input and assistance to ensure development of children's ethnic and cultural identities

was encouraged. Training on diversity issues formed part of staff and care training programmes in the past year.

Feedback from placing authorities and from young people was of good support offered in agency placements for encouraging young people's educational achievement. This was confirmed by scrutiny of young people's and carers' files. These showed evidence of generally consistent good liaison and input from carers with young people's schools and colleges. In one case where carer commitment in this area was not satisfactory it was good to note the considerable additional guidance and direction provided by the agency to improve matters. Educational progress and issues were noted to be regularly checked as part of carer supervision meetings. The agency maintained central records of children's formal educational achievements such as GCSE results. Feedback from a meeting with carers was of good support from the agency if they had difficulties in ensuring appropriate support from schools and education authorities. It was also good to note the pressure placed by the agency on placing authorities to provide proper personal education plans.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10 & 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement was made using the available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency had good arrangements in place to ensure contact for young people was positively supported and promoted where this was relevant to their care planning.

The agency had adequate systems in place to ensure young people could express their views.

EVIDENCE:

Scrutiny of carer and young people's files confirmed that where contact arrangements were in place these were appropriately noted in placement agreements and subsequent review and care plan documentation. Feedback from placing authorities and young people themselves in questionnaires confirmed that carers were supportive of contact arrangements and worked positively to engage with birth families, where this was part of care planning.

Actual formal contact sessions were usually supervised by local authority staff or on occasion by support staff provided by the agency. Foster carers were appreciative of this approach to contact management as it relieved them of potential concerns and risks if they undertook the contact management themselves.

Young people had opportunities to express their views and opinions in formal ways through usual care planning and review meetings, which were the responsibility of placing authorities, and through contribution to carer

household reviews and the agency's quality assurance reviews. Evidence of this was seen on files during the inspection.

With the growth of placement numbers the agency was considering the development of young people's meetings to provide an additional vehicle to hear their views on the quality of services provided by the agency.

Past inspections and feedback on this occasion from carers confirmed that, where necessary, the agency has been very active in ensuring young people had access to additional advocacy support and advice to make sure their voice was heard where there was disagreement with placing authorities planning decisions.

At a more informal level the feedback in young people's questionnaires indicated they were readily involved in day-to-day household decision-making and made to feel a part of 'family' decisions.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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 the following standard(s):

14 & 29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement was made using the available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The age range of children in place meant that the agency had not yet had to deal with significant numbers of children preparing for adulthood and independence. Past inspections have confirmed that on an individual basis however the agency had worked hard to manage transitions to adulthood focusing on the needs and best interests of young people to ensure, for example, they were not placed in situations of undue vulnerability. Feedback from carers talked to was that they did attempt to ensure young people as they grew up in placement acquired the necessary skills to manage the challenges they would face in the future. However as a matter of good practice, in anticipation of greater numbers of older children in transition, the agency would benefit from the development of a clearer policy and practice strategy on preparation for adulthood, to ensure this is managed in consistent ways by carers.

Cares were paid a competitive level of allowances by the agency following a significant increase in payments in the course of the last year. Feedback from cares was that this covered all relevant costs. They also confirmed payment of allowance and reimbursement of other expenses ran smoothly.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 & 26.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement was made using the available evidence including a visit to this service.

An appropriate statement of purpose was in place that met statutory expectations.

Staff were organised and managed effectively to ensure best outcomes for carers and placed young people.

Staffing numbers, qualifications and experience were appropriate to the current needs of the agency.

The agency provided an excellent support structure for carers to ensure they could meet the needs of children consistently.

Records for children were very well maintained to provide a good record of their achievements and progress in placement.

Central administrative records were well maintained providing a reliable and clear record of the agency's operation.

The agency's premises were now inadequate to meet the growing needs of the agency and its staff team.

The agency did not provide family and friends carers. This key standard was therefore not inspected.

EVIDENCE:

The agency had an up to date statement of purpose in place that accurately reflected the structure and nature of services provided and met the expectations of the regulations and standards.

Based on discussion with staff and carers, and observation of the day to day running of the agency, organisation and deployment of staff was well managed by the registered manager and Director. Social work staffing had increased since the last inspection to cope with growing carer numbers and to provide a more consistent input to carer recruitment and family finding processes. Carer feedback was of ready access to staff when needed and scrutiny of carer files indicated staffing levels were sufficient to support the varied functions of the agency. Staff felt their workloads were managed satisfactorily and were very satisfied with the workplace ethos and level of support on hand. The registered manager was in the final stages of achieving an NVQ 4 management award.

Staff turnover had been unsurprisingly low for such a small agency with one social work staff and the administrator having left since the last inspection. The inability to establish a consistent administrator had been an ongoing problem for the agency but did not appear to have impacted unduly on the effective running of the agency.

Staff files indicated that the social work staff were appropriately experienced and qualified to carry out their designated roles. There was good support for ongoing development and training and regular recorded individual supervision.

Written and verbal feedback from carers was overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the quality of support provided for them by the agency, confirming findings at previous inspections. The core element of support was formal recorded supervision once every two weeks. Files showed this to be of a high quality addressing relevant issues for carers as well as providing good monitoring of placed children's progress. Carers also had, for example, ready access to in and out of hours telephone support, regular carer forums, planned respite breaks if needed, input from agency sessional workers around particular events or issues. There was a good range of relevant training provided for carers covering both core and optional elements of practice development. Carer household reviews were being held in line with statutory expectations.

Records for placed children were very well maintained, judging from the sample inspected, containing good detail on needs, key events and progress alongside regular monitoring of their general care arrangements in placement. The files provided good evidence of consistent communication and liaison with placing authorities on relevant issues. Occasional gaps in the provision of LAC information were still evident although the agency had clearly been taking steps to address identified shortfalls. As a matter of good practice it would benefit the agency to be more insistent on receipt of all this information before placements are finalised.

With one or two exceptions other central records and carer files were equally well maintained and the relatively minor shortfalls noted at the last inspection had been addressed so the sample seen was generally fully compliant with statutory expectations. One exception related to a lack of information on a carer's file relating to the circumstances of the termination of placement where there were apparent earlier concerns about a child self-harming. The other relatively minor problem noted was that electronic records of contact sheets maintained by staff on computer were not printing out fully, so that paper records on file were sometimes missing key lines of information

The agency's accommodation was not wholly satisfactory, due to expansion of the service, increase in staff numbers and the need for more appropriate confidential locations to meet with staff, carers and other agencies. The Director was in the process of actively identifying new premises at the time of this inspection, as a consequence no requirements or recommendations have been made at this time.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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	2
29	4

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS8	That the agency ensures foster placement agreements are consistently completed and signed by all relevant parties.
2	FS14	That the agency develops more focused policy and guidance for carers on preparation of young people for adulthood
3	FS24	That the agency ensure all aspects of LAC documentation are fully completed and received prior to placements commencing
4	FS25	That the agency ensures the circumstances of termination of placements are always clearly recorded in carer files

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