



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Rural Foster Care Ltd

**Arlington House
15 Orchard Gardens
Teignmouth
Devon
TQ14 8DS**

Lead Inspector
Deborah Turner

Announced Inspection
18th October 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	Rural Foster Care Ltd
Address	Arlington House 15 Orchard Gardens Teignmouth Devon TQ14 8DS
Telephone number	01626 776702
Fax number	01626 777118
Email address	rfc.arlington@btconnect.com
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Rural Foster Care Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Sonia Dawn Grute
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 5th August 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Rural Foster Care is an Independent Fostering Agency registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection in October 2002. The main focus of recruitment and placements by the agency is largely within the rural community. The agency provides placements in Southern England and has sought to develop groups of carers who can be supported within distinct geographical areas. At the start of the inspection the agency had 39 households approved and 35 young people placed.

The agency offers emergency, short term, medium, long term, sibling group placements, therapeutic and mother and baby. Assessments of parent and child placements are made as part of court proceedings and on behalf of local authorities.

Recruitment of carers is geographically based and carers follow a competence based assessment process.

Training programmes are offered "in house" and via external training providers. Carers are supported by allocated supervising social workers that visit on a two weekly basis. The team also provides a 24-hour duty on call service. The agency is based within a town house in Teignmouth in Devon but also has offices in Ringwood in Hampshire and Bridgwater in Somerset.

Fostering allowances range from £275 - £600 per week.

Fees are negotiated with the placing authority on an individual child basis.

SUMMARY

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

This was an announced key inspection undertaken by Deborah Turner, Regulation Inspector, over a period of approximately 5 days. The judgements contained in this report have been made from evidence gathered during the inspection, which included a visit to the service and takes in to account the views and experiences of people using the service.

The inspector used "case tracking methodology" which involved the examination of records/documents, discussion with the agency staff, carers and children to determine how the agency is meeting the National Minimum Standards.

22 NMS were assessed: The service has met 16, partly met 3 and exceeded 3 standards.

Child friendly summary.

The manager of the fostering service was told in summer that an inspection would be happening and that it might take about a week to do. In August the inspector met with the directors (senior people at Rural Foster Care) and Sonia the manager who is one of the directors, to work out how the inspection should be done, and whom the inspector should go out and meet.

When all this had been agreed the inspector started getting ready to come to the agency to look at how it worked. The inspector sent out questionnaires to social workers, children and foster carers to ask what they thought about Rural Foster Care. You, your foster carers and your social workers said some very nice things. Thank you for sending my questionnaires back.

When I started the inspection I had to look at lots of paperwork and go to the foster panel. This is where a group of people recommend if people are good enough to be foster carers and look after children and young people like you. The social workers at Rural Foster Care had done lots of checks on the people and visited them many times to make sure they were suitable to care for children.

I looked at files at the office in Devon and read about where some of you live with your foster carers. I came out to visit four foster carers at home; unfortunately not all the children were at home as it was term time. I did meet three young people and it was very nice to have a chance to talk to them about what they liked about their foster home.

Sonia the manager, David and George (directors) sent me lots of forms and information about what they think they do well, what they want to do better and what they are going to do in the future. I have used the notes I made about the files, my meetings with foster carers, and Rural Foster Care social workers and the staff who work at the office in Devon, the information from everyone who sent back questionnaires to help me to write my report.

What the service does well:

There were some good things that the inspector saw and was told about by young people, their social workers and foster carers.

Rural Foster Care staff were working hard to make sure that your health and emotional needs were being met. They had made special arrangements for dental treatment for anyone who could not get free treatment. Rural Foster Care also have a person who can come and do special work with you and your foster carers if you are having difficulties, so that hopefully things can get sorted out and your placement does not breakdown. Rural Foster Care were very keen to make sure that you could go on activities and holidays and they gave your foster carers some extra money to make sure that you could enjoy things during the summer school holidays.

Lots of your social workers sent back the surveys I sent, I got 33 back although 2 were not filled in. That is amazing because I sometimes don't get many back.

Your social workers were very pleased with Rural Foster Care and said that they worked well with them and that they kept you safe. Your foster carers get training about keeping you safe and one lady said it was the best training event she had been to. Other foster carers are doing courses in childcare and will get certificates when they complete this.

Your foster carers said that they get lots of support from their social workers that visited them lots and are always there on the end of the phone if they need special advice or a chat.

Your social workers were really pleased about how well your foster carers were doing in helping you keep in contact with your family and friends. Lots of your social workers said that they would use Rural Foster Care again.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspector came to look at Rural Foster Care they have done lots of things. All the things the inspector said they had to do have now been done. Sonia, David and George had made lots of changes like buying a new computer system so that all the offices can keep in contact and send e-mails and information to each other.

What they could do better:

Rural Foster Care does lots of checks to make sure that foster carers are really able to look after to you. They have a group of people called the panel who recommend that the foster carers be allowed to care for you. They needed to make sure that all the social workers do the checks in the same way so that when they are inspected information is not missing or forgotten. They also needed to chase your social workers more so that they get all the right information about you and could make sure that your foster carers were able to look after you before you moved in. They also needed to get permission for your foster carers to take you to hospital or the doctors for treatment. I have asked Sonia and David to add some information to your guide, for example about bullying so that you can understand more about being bullied and whom you can talk to. I have also asked them to think about involving you in designing a newsletter.

I have asked them to make sure that they check things at your foster carers house more often, things like the MOT on the car and the car and house insurance, also to check that the gas boiler is being looked at every year to make sure it is safe.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

NMS 12

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The health care needs of the children placed with foster carers were being well maintained.

However, the inspector did note specific exceptions to this in regard to ensuring that placement agreements were in place, with signed and authorised medical consent from the person with parental responsibility.

This is considered poor practice as it leaves the agency, young people and in particular foster carers vulnerable should any medical emergency arise. If this is allowed to continue it is likely to have bearing on the overall rating at subsequent inspections of this service.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector case tracked a total of 5 young people currently placed with Rural Foster Care. Only one young person had full medical consent signed as required within the Looked After Children procedures and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

There was evidence found in files examined and within minutes of meetings with foster carers to confirm that they were proactive in ensuring that the young people in their care were receiving medical care, support and advise.

Information collected at the pre-inspection visit and within the annual quality assurance assessment indicated that Rural Foster Care considered that they were good at ensuring young people received primary medical services.

Rural Foster Care had secured insurance for private dental care to assist where young people were unable to be registered with an NHS dental practice. The Looked After Children annual medicals were generally being maintained on time.

The inspection report dated 05.08.05 contained the following recommendation.

The agency should ensure that a transferable health record is created and maintained by the carers, for each child / young person placed with them

Within the annual quality assurance assessment Rural Foster Care considered that they had areas of development to progress. The health passport is one of the identified areas. In an interview with the responsible individual he informed the inspector that it is currently unclear whether a format for health passports would be developed by the Department of Health. Rural Foster Care had a draft document for the health passport/record that was very detailed and would be a good document if it were reduced in some areas. Some areas of the record would duplicate information from other documents such as the looked after children.

Rural Foster Care indicated that they considered that they could take a more active role in promoting the needs of young people who required mental health services. (CAMHS)

Rural Foster Care had one foster carer who provided a therapeutic placement. This was reported to be working well. The inspector was informed that Rural Foster Care employed the services of a therapeutic crisis intervention therapist. This was described as time-limited intervention created to help work with the child/young person and foster carers in order to minimise placement breakdowns. The inspector was informed that this intervention is similar to solutions based family therapy. The inspector was told that the therapist had also worked with foster carers who cared for a young person with Autism.

The inspector visited a foster carer who provided care to a young person with a disability. The foster carer was receiving input from an occupational therapist and had been able to secure the provision of new equipment for the young person that would enhance their independent mobility.

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.

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

NMS 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service made available foster carers who provided stimulating and nurturing environments. Some improvement to monitoring of health and safety checks was required.

Appropriate matching processes had been undertaken, although this was evidenced more by placement stability than written matching reports. Safety welfare and protection of children was promoted through training and support of foster carers and staff.

The foster panel conducted business in friendly and open manner. However, documented/written evidence that the agency decision maker is in agreement with the panel recommendations should be maintained more consistently.

Recruitment and selection procedures were reported to be in place. A shortfall was noted in one personnel file examined.

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the service had been interviewed and registered by the Commission for Social Care Inspection as a fit person to manage an agency.

The registered manager is a qualified social worker and counsellor and had experience of working within children's social care.

The inspector examined the qualification certificates for both the registered manager and a recently employed social worker. These were in order.

Both had registered with the General Social Care Council and had a current Criminal Records Bureau check at an enhanced level.

The Responsible Individual also had a social work qualification. Although certification was not examined on this occasion, this had been verified at the point of registration.

The inspector visited four foster carers. The inspector looked at a two young people's bedrooms during her visits, these had been individualised to reflect the personal interests and taste of the young person.

The foster carers visited confirmed that the agency had completed a full health and safety check during their assessment. The record of this check was seen on all files examined. However, some of these would benefit from updating. Also where action has been identified there was no evidence that a second check had been made to conclude that all matters identified had been dealt with.

The inspector was able to find some written evidence of the matching processes used for placing some of the young people case tracked. However, there was no consistent recording system supporting this. The success of matching was better evidenced in the data provided about length of placements and placement stability. The agency was able to produce significant data about placements and any reason for disruption or breakdown. Some figures provided indicated that there were 6 young people who had been in placement for over 2 years, 8 had been in placement for 12 months plus and 15 for 6 months plus. Rural Foster Care had one therapeutic placement this had been active for 7 months.

Foster carers visited were able to confirm that matching and pre-visits had taken place for the young people in their care. One young person had had a very considered introduction to the foster home and family.

The foster carer's information pack contained information about managing difficult behaviours, guidance on acceptable forms of sanction and discipline. The foster carers seen by the inspector were aware of the agency's reporting procedures and how to contact the agency out of hours should any reportable incident occur. Foster carers were required to report accidents and visits to hospital within the weekly diary report. Foster carers visited stated if the young person in their care had a significant accident or incident that they would contact Rural Foster Care and the young person's social worker promptly to report this.

Feedback from carers indicated that the agency out of hours support was very good. Two foster carers visited were able to give a very good examples of the

support given to them out of hours and following an incident. Records of accidents were examined as part of this inspection.

The foster care agreement issued by the agency alerts foster carers to the fact that the Commission as part of an inspection process may interview them.

In the inspection report dated 05.08.05 the following recommendation was made:

The agency should ensure that Safe Care assessments are in place for ALL placements prior to the admission of the young person to the placement.

Although the inspector was shown a safe care plan, not all carers visited had a written safe care policy. All were able to verbalise the rules of the house, the action taken to ensure privacy and respect for individuals' private bedrooms. The wider implications of safe care and household safety required more exploration, and might be a useful training subject for foster carers and staff. Foster carers visited had received training in child protection procedures. One foster carer visited stated it was one of the best training events she had attended. The information pack issued to foster carers does contain information about various forms of child neglect and abuse, and guides the foster carers should a young person make a disclosure.

The inspector was provided with a copy of the whistle blowing policy. The details for the Commission required updating.

The recruitment files for two members of staff were examined. Both contained evidence of qualifications and registration with the General Social Care Council. One file had evidence of a telephone reference. However, the written reference confirming the content of the conversation was not on file.

Other vetting procedures were complete and in place before the person took up employment. Staff had received induction and had an opportunity to shadow experienced staff.

The inspector attended and observed the business of the foster panel meeting held on 07.10.06. Panel papers were received beforehand and two new assessments were put before panel on that occasion. Both were foster carers transferring from another agency and the transfer of foster carers protocol had been applied.

On this occasion the vice chair led panel. Panel members agreed questions to put to the prospective foster carers before they were asked into the room. However, the chair did forget to ask some pre-agreed questions. This might be avoided if a list of questions is agreed and written up before the foster carers come into the room.

Questions about gaps in the assessments were directed to the manager and responsible individual. The assessing social workers were not present. All members were able to ask those presenting cases to panel further questions.

Debate and collaborative working with all members input being considered and valued was observed. All decisions were formally recorded.

The agency had produced a document for any one attending panel that provided a brief description of the panel members. The inspector was informed that panel members had attended a workshop in 2002 that gave them information and guidance about the functions of panel, and that annually training and workshops took place. The next is planned for November. In some files examined there was a written précis of the panel recommendation; a space for the chair to sign was provided, however this had not been completed. The inspector considered that this space should also include the agency decision makers decision/recommendation. The letter to foster carers was not being signed by the agency decision maker.

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.

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

NMS 7 and 13

NMS 31 is not applicable

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Rural Foster Care makes satisfactory efforts to provide placements that are able to meet the skills, talents and abilities of the individual young person. Equality and diversity were considered by Rural Foster Care to be an essential and central element of all placements.

The educational needs of every child were being given a high priority, alongside encouragement for young people to attain their full potential

EVIDENCE:

Information collected at the pre-inspection visit and within the annual quality assurance assessment indicated that Rural Foster Care considered that they were:

'Addressing equality and diversity issues at all stages of foster carers careers. That this formed a core part of the competency assessment and the skills to foster course'

Young people were being encouraged and supported to use an advocate, and foster carers were supporting this value/aspiration.

Rural Foster Care considered that equality and diversity were central in their human resource policies.

The inspector was provided with a draft copy of a booklet intended for foster carers that outlines the five outcomes in every child matters. This had been designed using plain English and gave a brief summary of the five outcomes. It suggested what action a foster carer might take in order to ensure that the five outcomes formed part of the life style of any child in their care.

Rural Foster Care had supported the placement of young person with a disability. This placement was visited and was reported by the foster carer to be going well. The young person was not at home at the time of the visit. However, they had returned the pre-inspection survey and had indicated satisfaction with the placement.

Rural Foster Care offered young people an opportunity to attend therapeutic horsemanship and equine assisted learning programmes. The philosophy behind this, and in brief is that the horse is used as a therapeutic medium. The information provided to the inspector stated that this is because horses are considered to mirror behaviour and they will respond to body language and voice tones. The information considered that young people could experience through this medium the effects of certain behaviours and develop improved communication as well increase in self-confidence, self-control and awareness. The programme is not about learning to ride but a much fuller experience of being with animals.

Activities included, grooming, looking after and learning how to handle a horse, horse psychology and how horses communicate. Rural Foster Care meets half of the cost of this activity.

The inspector made contact with one foster carer who had a young person that had experience of the therapeutic horsemanship and equine assisted learning programmes. The foster carer indicated that the young person had enjoyed the experience. The foster carer thought that although it was still early days in terms of the placement. There were some signs that having had an opportunity to experience looking after animals and respecting them had been useful in helping the young person to develop and improve self-control.

Foster carers who met with the inspector were able to give examples about how they had or were supporting the young people in their care to develop their individual talents and abilities; for example, dancing and swimming.

It was reported that Rural Foster Care were considering a new foster carer recruitment strategy. This would involve close working with local placing authorities and would focus on the child being central to the identification of a suitable foster carer. The child profile would be used to recruit a foster carer for that individual child. This was seen as a strategy that would allow any child/young person that was unlikely to find a long term match to have a foster carer recruited and trained to meet their specific care needs. Currently foster carers are assessed/approved and then matching takes place.

The young people commented to the inspector, either through discussion or questionnaires that they were encouraged and supported to follow their individual interests and hobbies. Examples were provided by foster carers about how the foster child had been integrated into their wider family and made friends within the local community.

Five children's files were examined as part of the case tracking exercise. 3 files contained significant information about the child's educational plan/needs. Foster carers were all clear about the agency's expectations concerning the maintenance of links with schools and being supportive of any ambitions or aspirations the child/young person might have. Some files included signed permission for school activities. This was not consistent in all files.

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.

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

NMS 10 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Support systems were in place that helped to maintain appropriate and agreed contact for the young people placed with Rural Foster Care.

The lines of communication and routes for consultation with young people were under review.

EVIDENCE:

Placements are made by Local Authorities and therefore the placing authority agrees any arrangements for contact visits at the time of the placement. These arrangements may alter as the placement progresses. The inspector met with 4 foster carers during the inspection of this service. All were able to verbalise the agreed contact arrangements for the children and young people in their care. Local authority placing social workers had not always supplied the foster carers with detailed contact arrangements at the point of placing the child. Rural Foster Care provided support to foster carers where they transported young people to contact visits.

Placing social workers indicated in the surveys returned that foster carers were working very well with the young person's family and that contact was well managed and supported. This is a difficult area of foster care and foster carers should be commended on this positive feedback.

Foster carers were asked to record in a diary any significant events in the children/young person's daily life. This may include recording information before and following contact visits.

One carer had not maintained these records since July 2006, but the foster carer gave the inspector assurances that she would recommence these in line with Rural Foster Care Policy. The inspector was able to track most of the details of the young people in her care through the supervising social workers supervision visit records.

Information collected at the pre-inspection visit and within the annual quality assurance assessment indicated that Rural Foster Care considered that they were in touch with the views of the children in their care. It was felt that some of this was achieved because supervising social workers via their visits made sure that they observed and met with the children and young people in placement. The inspector was informed during the pre-inspection planning meeting and during the inspection field visit, that young people had been surveyed about the following matters:

- Having a newsletter
- Setting up consultation groups
- Social events

The inspector explored the progress of consultation further during her interview with the responsible individual, who is also a director of Rural Foster Care. The idea of a newsletter was still under consideration. Difficulties about creating a meaningful newsletter, and how to ensure that it met the needs of a range of young people who have differing abilities and interests were discussed, and remained a challenge to successfully achieving this aim. Rural Foster Care reported that they provided young people with activity and fun days out; this was confirmed during visits to foster carers. Rural Foster Care provided a summer payment of £50.00 to all foster carers for activities. It was reported by the responsible individual that where it had been considered appropriate, additional financial assistance had been provided. An example was funding to attend a week at an activity centre for one young person. Rural Foster Care provide £250 to any foster carers taking young people on holiday.

The inspector received 8 surveys returned from young people. In response to the question

Do your carers listen to you and take notice of your opinions? Young people had answered:

3 = always

3 = usually

2 = sometimes

Does your social worker (placing social worker) listen to you and take notice of your opinions?

1 = always
4 = usually
1 = sometimes

One young person stated that they had not seen their social worker since July. One young person indicated that they felt that their social worker did not allow them to influence decisions about their life. The manager has taken action to support this young person receive the services of an advocate.

'Do you know who speak to if you are not happy or have a problem'?

4 = always.
2 = usually
2 = sometimes

'Do you know how to make a complaint?'

6 = yes
1 = don't know
1 = no

9 surveys were returned to the inspector from foster carers, 1 survey was blank. In response to the question below and given the option to score as excellent, good, adequate or poor the results were:

How would you rate the fostering service at involving the children and young people that you care for in decisions about their day-to-day lives?

3 =excellent
5 = good
1= question not filled in

How would you rate the fostering service at involving the children and young people that you care for in decisions about how the fostering service is run?

2 = excellent
5 = good
1 = poor
1= no comments received

The children's guide contained a simple explanation about what to do if you have a problem. It also stated that you might contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection if you were not happy about how a problem or complaint had been dealt with.

Evidence was seen in the minutes of review meetings to confirm that young people had been at the meeting, asked to comment on the placement or had a copy of the minutes. One foster carer stated that she sat with the young person in her care and read/discussed the content of the review report. Some young people case tracked were using the services of an independent advocate.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

NMS 29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Foster carers received an allowance that was paid according to the agreed expenses. This was received on time and was accurate.

EVIDENCE:

There a range of fees and allowances paid to foster carers. Explanation and full details about what is included in the allowances is issued to foster carers. Foster carers stated that they received payment on time and that payments were always accurate.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

NMS 1, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26

NMS 32 is not applicable

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service had a statement of purpose. This was examined. The children's/young person's guide would benefit from review.

Staff organisation and management systems were considered to be working well and staffing levels within the fostering service were satisfactory. Staff understood the organisational structures within which they worked. The agency is in a period of growth and therefore the need to consolidate current practices and improve systems for obtaining information from external agencies is considered essential. Rural Foster Care need to ensure uniformity of practices, ensuring consistent application of IT and administrative systems remain on track with the growth of the company

Measures were in place to support, supervise and assist foster carers personal development. Indications were that foster carers felt very well supported and valued.

Case records for the children required a robust system of audit to be applied consistently across the agency.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector examined the statement of purpose. This was a very comprehensive document well presented and containing all the points referred to within the National Minimum Standards.

The young persons guide is bright and laid out in a child friendly format. However, it did not contain all the details recommended within the National Minimum Standards, and would benefit further from having some details about bullying. The guide could also include details that alert children to their right to access files and records.

Staff were organised across three areas

The main office being in Teignmouth Devon where the registered manager, responsible individual, administration and business support staff were based. Supervising social work staff were also based in offices in Hampshire and Somerset. Social work staff received one to one supervision from the registered manager or responsible individual. Records of staff supervision sessions and formal appraisals were being retained. The inspector examined a copy of a recently completed staff appraisal.

The inspector met with the area development managers for Hampshire and Somerset and one supervising social worker. All staff that met with the inspector felt that they held manageable caseloads. The area development managers also held caseloads and they confirmed that this was currently manageable alongside their other developmental responsibilities.

Evidence was seen on those files examined that foster carers were provided with training and development opportunities, and that efforts were being made

to offer training at venues and times that facilitated options for both foster carers to attend. Foster carers had retained copies of certificates awarded to them at training. There was an electronic record for each foster carer detailing their training portfolio.

The registered manager informed the inspector that 10 foster carers in Devon and 6 in Hampshire had elected to commence NVQ 3 training at the end of October. The inspector met with a foster carer who was in the process of undertaking the AKAMAS BTEC on line training. This was viewed by the foster carer as a very thought provoking and helpful course. She described the mechanisms for support from on line tutors and mentors as helpful.

Qualified social workers interviewed had registered with the General Social Care Council and were aware that they were required to maintain a training and development portfolio. Recently recruited staff had attended some in house training events. Social work staff were confident that Rural Foster Care would support professional development.

There was no evidence that the agency's response to enquiries from prospective foster carers were delayed. One foster carer interviewed had chosen to foster with Rural Foster Care because of their prompt response to her enquiry.

It was reported that the website went live two months prior to the inspection, and had already generated considerable interest. The web page had a ring back facility and thus far had attracted 9 enquiries. 3 were in the process of assessment. Rural Foster Care had a member of the administrative staff specifically linked to advertising and marketing who described several proposals for expanding in this area.

Discussion about staff recruitment and retention took place between the three directors of Rural Foster Care and the inspector. The directors identified areas that they felt helped to provide staff with job satisfaction, such as regular one to one support, open communication systems, good working conditions, regular meetings and a comprehensive appraisal system. Staff interviewed were positive about their employer and were enthusiastic about the future development of Rural Foster Care. For example one person said *'it is a refreshing change to work with a caseload you can manage'* One member of staff indicated that Rural Foster Care was a listening organisation, and gave an example of how when a change had been made and foster carers were not happy, this had been reversed to the previous way of working.

Prospective foster carers are visited following contact with Rural Foster Care. If during this initial contact the visiting social worker thinks the applicant should continue an application pack is sent out, visits and the full assessment process would then commence.

Foster carers' assessments in the main were satisfactory, with the files examined as part of case tracking having all or most of the required information and statutory checks. However, one file did not have a full chronology of employment for both foster carers. The registered manager was alerted to this shortfall at the time of the inspection and undertook to ensure that this information would be obtained.

The quality of assessments varied and some were considered more thorough than others. The inspector read two new assessments in preparation for attending panel, and again these varied in style and content.

The foster carers interviewed confirmed that they received one to one support on a two weekly basis. Records were retained within individual files of the foster carers supervision session. Out of hours arrangements were in place and were considered by those foster carers interviewed and surveyed to be good. The foster carers used for case tracking purposes were aware of the annual review process. Comments about support from Rural Foster Care included: *'they are 100% there for you' 'the on call system works very well' 'the on call system is excellent' 'I can ring my social worker and she is always a great help' 'it is a good agency they value us'*

Following a recent change to approval status for one carer visited, the foster care agreement required updating.

Foster carers visited indicated that they relied quite a lot on their supervising social worker when liaising with the child/young persons placing authority. Foster carers had been issued with details about recording and were completing diary sheets that were sent to Rural Foster Care monthly. Foster carers stated that they frequently discussed the content of the diary sheets with their supervising social worker.

The children/young people's files examined as part of case tracking varied in content and quality. This was considered to be a particular area of weakness and robust systems were required in order to ensure that all the essential and required documentation is received from the placing social worker before any placement is agreed; this includes risk assessments. One file had inaccurate dates entered by the placing social worker this had not been noted or challenged by Rural Foster Care. One child's documentation contained paperwork completed for previous placements and was not accurate with the current placement with Rural Foster Care.

One foster carer visited by the inspector had no written information about the child in their care and had little insight about what they should have been provided with. The vast majority of the looked after children documentation was not appropriately signed and dated by the placing authority and where applicable by the foster carers

Documents issued by Rural Foster Care such as contracts of care were not present on all files. Consent to school outings and activities were seen in some but not all children/young peoples files.

The inspector observed during her field visit to Rural Foster Care offices that files were stored securely and systems were in place to protect IT data. Considerable investment had been made in purchasing a secure server (Virtual Private Network) and IT system 'Foster Track' that was designed to assist in the achievement of a paperless communication system. The system was still in its infancy but there were obvious benefits to the system, provided all relevant data is inputted promptly and staff do not create secondary systems. Doors in some areas were password coded for access. The quality audit completed and supplied by Rural Foster Care stated that they had guidance for staff on accessing, keeping and maintaining records, a policy on secure storage of records and an access to records. The inspector did not examine the policies and procedures referred to above. The inspector did look at systems for maintaining records of incidents, accidents and allegations these were satisfactory. In the report dated 05.08.05 the following requirement was made:

The Registered Person must establish and maintain a system for the monitoring of the matters set out in Schedule 7 at appropriate intervals and demonstrated as a clear auditable process.

The registered manager had put in place a system of audits in line with the guidance of Regulation 42 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Rural Foster Care premises in Devon and Hampshire were visited these were considered fit for purpose with adequate storage and security systems.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	3
31	N/A

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS12	34 (3) schedule 6 and 17.3	Rural Foster Care staff must ensure that medical consent for any young person placed with a foster carer is obtained from the placing authority and is duly signed by the person with parental responsibility. This to be obtained before a placement is agreed.	31/12/06
2	FS12	34 (3) schedule 6 and 17.3	Rural Foster Care must obtain a copy of the child/young person's placement plan part 1, part 2 and essential information details 1 and 2. These must be for the current placement and be duly signed by all parties including the foster carers where applicable.	31/12/06
3	FS12	11 (a)	Foster carers must be issued with a copy of the documents referred to in requirements 1 and 2.	31/12/06
4	FS17	27 Schedule 3	A full employment chronology must be in place before a foster carer is approved.	30/11/06
5	FS24	34 (3) Schedule 6	A robust system of audit must be put in place in order to ensure that looked after children information and foster placement	31/12/06

			agreements are in place for any child placed with Rural Foster Care. These must be current.	
6	FS15	20 (3) (i) Schedule 1	Two written references must be obtained for any employee, before they take up post. The evidence of any telephone enquiry concerning a reference must be formally recorded.	30/11/06
7	FS15	20 (3) (i) Schedule 1	Where a person has previously worked in a position whose duties involved work with children or vulnerable adults, verification of the reason why the employment or position ended to be obtained (so far as is practicable).	30/10/06

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	FS12	The agency should ensure that a transferable health record is created and maintained by the carers, for each child / young person placed with them. Repeated from the report-dated 05.08.05.
2	FS24	The agency should ensure that updated risk assessments are carried out as appropriate and the evidence held in the children's case file. Repeated from the report-dated 05.08.05.
3	FS6	Where a health and safety check has identified action to be taken by the foster carers this should be reassessed to ensure that the required action has been taken. This should be evidenced for inspection purposes.
4	FS6	Evidence that the foster carers health and safety check is reviewed annually should be maintained for inspection purposes. Annual checks should be made of: • MOT and Car insurance • Household insurance • Gas appliance testing

5	FS9 FS23	Training in creating and applying household safe care plans should be considered for foster carers and staff.
6	FS9 FS25	A check should be carried out of all documents in order to ensure that the details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection replace those referring to the National Care Standards Commission.
7	FS15	The standard reference request letter should ask the referee to comment on suitability of the applicant to work with children.
8	FS30	The précis of panel recommendation should be signed by the chair and confirmed by the agency decision maker. Letters to foster carers from the agency decision maker should be signed.
9	FS1	Details about advocacy services should appear in the children/young people's guide. Details of the telephone numbers for support if you are being bullied and a brief explanation about bullying should be included within the children's guide.
10	FS17	Foster carers assessments should be completed in a uniformed format and style and should demonstrate/evidence of: • Attempts made to contact an applicants previous partner • Wherever possible interviews with all the applicants children, including those from previous relationships • Discussion about those points listed in NMS 17.7

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Somerset Records Management Unit

Ground Floor

Riverside Chambers

Castle Street

Taunton

TA1 4AL

National Enquiry Line

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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