



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Solutions Fostering Agency

**Solutions (Ross) Ltd
The Business Centre
Llangarron
Hereford
Herefordshire
HR9 6PG**

Lead Inspector
Sue Young

Announced Inspection
5th 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 Solutions Fostering Agency

Address Solutions (Ross) Ltd
The Business Centre
Llangarron
Hereford
Herefordshire
HR9 6PG

Telephone number 01989 770701

Fax number 01989 770011

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Solutions

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mr Anthony James Brooks

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. Change age range to 8-17 years

Date of last inspection 12th September 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Solutions Fostering Agency is a project that is part of a larger organisation, Solutions (Ross) Ltd a private company which provides residential child care services with education to young people who are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. It's Statement of Purpose states that the agency will provide foster placements for young people aged between 8 and 17 years who are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties and who are likely to make considerable demands on those caring for them. These young people may be admitted directly to foster care, others may have progressed from Solutions Residential units where it has been determined that their needs will be best met in a foster care placement. These plans may include either medium or long-term care and in some circumstances rehabilitation to their family home. Education is provided either through Solutions School or in mainstream schools or colleges. They recruit carers from a wide range of backgrounds. All carers are trained, given a high level of support appropriate to their needs. Solutions recruit carers to undertake a variety of tasks the categories given are; Short term, long term, and respite placements.

SUMMARY

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

Two inspectors carried out this inspection over seven days

Two foster carers and the young people placed with them were selected, their files were read and they were visited in their homes.

Interviews were undertaken with the registered manager and members of the social work team. A range of records of the fostering agency was read and minutes of the Panel Meetings sampled.

Questionnaires were sent to foster carers, young people, birth parents and placing authority social workers. Nine children's, ten foster carers, three social workers and three parents questionnaires were returned.

The manager completed a pre-inspection and self-assessment questionnaire.

Standards not examined during this inspection had been previously met.

What the service does well:

Solutions promote the health and development needs of children and young people in their care. The agency has access to good resources to meet children and young people's emotional and social development needs.

Carers have access to a Consultant Psychotherapist for initial and ongoing advice support and guidance and Solutions employ two psychologists, who can offer ongoing therapy and support children in placement.

Solutions ensure the needs of children and young people are appropriately matched to carer's skills and abilities, taking into consideration, assessments and information sharing. Solutions have a low break down rate of placements. The matching pro forma however needs to better evidence the matching process and demonstrate how any gaps in matching are compensated for.

Good, planned introductions take place and carers are given good information prior to placements commencing.

The agency gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of the young people looked after. Young people placed with Solutions have an overall high level of school attendance. Solutions employ support workers who help carers ensure structured occupation during school hours is in place, for any young person not in full time education, and two registered schools, which young people in foster homes may attend if the, placing authority requests this.

The level of support given to carers and children is clearly one of the main strengths of the service. The supervision of foster carers is regular and of a high quality. Carers speak positively about the high level of support they are given whenever required . The allocation of support workers to each young person cared for by the agency is an excellent resource.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Solutions have developed and introduced a health record for foster carers to complete for each young person in their care.

Solutions have developed a system to ensure carer's transport is safe and appropriate to the child's needs. Copies of MOTs and car insurances are kept on carer's files.

A good safe caring policy is in place for all its foster carers, which is specific to each foster family and includes all family members and networks. This is reviewed on each placement.

Since the last inspection the agency now assesses all "back up" carers for named young people, according to the criteria stated in Schedule 3.

The agency ensures staff and foster carers sign a declaration regarding any possible conflicts of interest.

What they could do better:

Written risk assessments need to be conducted and evidenced on young people's files especially with regard to activities such as horse riding, and environmental issues such as the storage of medication.

The agency has developed a combined foster placement agreement (FPA) and matching form. This needs to be further developed to include all matters listed in Schedule 6.

A quality assurance system needs to be developed whereby panel comments are fed back to Solutions manager and action taken to improve the quality of Form F assessments and carers review reports.

Solutions fostering manager must ensure all foster carers are approved by the agency decision maker before any children or young people are placed with them. All carers must be given notice in writing specifying the terms of the approval before any placements are made.

The complaints system needs to be promoted by Solutions to enable younger children and those with communication difficulties easily access the complaints procedure.

The manager has developed systems for the collection and monitoring of matters listed in Schedule 7. This needs to be further developed to evidence the evaluation and analysis of the agency's performance to ensure quality of care is provided and improved. A report needs to be supplied to the Commission in respect of any review of the quality of care conducted by the agency in line with Regulation 42.

No evidence of annual unannounced visits being conducted to foster carers could be seen. These visits should be conducted and evidenced on foster carer's files.

A record needs to be maintained on each foster carers file of each placement made which states the name, age, sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination, in line with Regulation 30(3) (a).

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.

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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 excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Solutions actively promote the health and development needs of children and young people in their care.

EVIDENCE:

Solutions have initial referral forms, which address the health needs of young people placed in their care. Health considerations form part of the matching process. Necessary health information is gained at the point of placement and children's health needs are assessed and addressed before and throughout the placement.

From questionnaires and from discussions with foster carers and staff it was seen that carers are provided with the support they need to promote good health for the children and young people they are caring for. They are clear about their responsibilities and evidence was seen of carers working in partnership with others to promote good health for the children they care for.

All children and young people visited were registered with a doctor and attended health appointments when required.

Solutions Fostering Service has access to good resources to meet children and young people's emotional and social development needs. Carers have access to a Consultant Psychotherapist for initial and ongoing advice support and guidance and Solutions employ two psychologists, who can offer ongoing therapy and support to children in placement. The fostering manager is given a

budget, which can be spent on counselling, psychiatric assessments, therapy etc, for young people if required.

Solutions have developed and introduced a health record for foster carers to complete for each young person in their care.

Returned questionnaires and discussions with young people during visits demonstrated that young people have appropriate knowledge of healthy lifestyles and feel encouraged and supported in developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

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

The agency is managed and staffed by people who are appropriately qualified. Children are well matched and carers appropriately assessed. Risk assessments need to be undertaken and quality assessment function of panel needs to be followed through.

EVIDENCE:

Foster homes visited were warm, adequately furnished and comfortable. All children had their own bedroom, which was suitable for their needs.

Evidence was seen on carer's files of health and safety checks being conducted. The manager needs to ensure that any remedial action identified is recorded when completed.

Solutions have developed a system to ensure carer's transport is safe and appropriate to the child's needs. Copies of MOTs and car insurances were seen on carer's files.

Evidence could not be seen of detailed risk assessments having been conducted within foster homes with regard to activities such as horse riding and environmental issues such as the storage of medication. Written risk assessments need to be conducted and evidenced on young people's files to ensure safety from accidental injury.

Discussions with staff and foster carers demonstrated that the needs of children and young people were being appropriately matched to carer's skills and abilities and takes into consideration, assessments and information sharing. The manager needs to develop the matching pro forma to better evidence the matching process and demonstrate how any gaps in matching are compensated for.

Solutions have a low break down rate of placements

Staff, carers and young people stated that placements were made with sufficient time for planned introductions to take place. Good information is given to carers prior to commencement of placement.

The agency has developed a combined foster placement agreement (FPA) and matching form. This needs to be further developed to include all matters listed in Schedule 6. i.e. any needs arising from disability, the responsible authority's arrangements for financial support, the arrangements and frequency of visits to the child, and compliance in terms of the foster care agreement (FCA).

Policies, procedures and staff guidance are in place with regard to child protection and safe caring. Staff were clear about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children.

Solutions have developed a good safe caring policy in place for all its foster carers which specific to each foster family and include all family members and networks. This is reviewed on each placement. The manager must ensure this is seen and signed by the young person's social worker prior to placement and signed by the supervising fostering social worker. Carers demonstrated a good awareness of safe caring and were aware of the procedures for responding to allegations, complaints and absconding.

Comprehensive child protection and safe caring training is provided for all staff and carers, which is regularly reviewed and up dated and incorporates best safeguarding practice.

Solutions have a suitable staff recruitment system in place, which meets requirements. Personnel files were sampled and demonstrated that the agency is ensuring that vetting requirements are addressed. The manager and staff team are appropriately qualified and able to demonstrate they have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their duties. CRB checks were examined. Three foster carers and two members of staff's CRB's were out of date and were in the process of renewal.

Solutions operate a joint fostering panel with another fostering agency. The panel was not observed as part of this inspection. The minutes and paperwork of the last three panel meetings were examined. The minutes demonstrated the panel has a good quality assurance function; comments were made re quality of Form F's produced to panel and of assessments being presented to panel with incomplete paperwork i.e. health assessments missing, references not received, competencies not signed etc. No evidence however could be seen of these comments being delivered back to Solutions and of any action taken to improve the quality of work accordingly. A quality assurance system needs to be developed whereby panel comments are fed back to Solutions manager and action taken to improve quality as a result.

The minutes of the fostering panel need to clearly demonstrate panel member's role on panel and which agency foster carers are being assessed and reviewed for.

Solutions fostering manager must ensure all foster carers are approved by the agency decision maker before any children or young people are placed with them .All carers must be given notice in writing specifying the terms of the approval before any placements are made. Evidence was seen where one foster carer had not had approval from the agency decision maker for 5 months after attending panel and had had 2 placements during this period.

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

Foster carers and staff demonstrate awareness in relation to issues of equality and opportunity for young people in their care.

The agency gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of the young people looked after.

EVIDENCE:

Files and discussions with supervising social workers and foster carers evidenced the active role the agency takes in ensuring that each young person's identity and diversity is supported. Feedback from carers in questionnaires felt the agency addressed issues of equality and diversity

Support workers are allocated to each young person placed with foster carers to work with the young person, often away from the foster home, to develop skills and interests, enhance confidence etc

A good example was seen of foster carers and Solutions working together to help a young person with communication difficulties. Solutions have been

providing support workers to help the young person improve his access to communication using the widget system.

A diverse range of activities was available to young people and was seen to be promoted by Solutions staff and foster carers. In questionnaires young people were able to state a wide variety they were engaged in, which included swimming, football, dancing, horse riding and cycling.

Staff and foster carers understand and support a child's educational development. They are encouraged and supported to develop creative and proactive approaches to children's education. Good examples were seen of carers working closely with schools supported by the agency where needed. Solutions have support workers who will help carers to ensure structured occupation during school hours is in place for any young person not in full time education, which is responsive to a child's individual needs.

From discussions with staff and carers it was evident that carers support children to maximise their potential and develop and pursue education. Carers assist with homework and ensure children regularly attend school. Overall young people placed with Solutions have a high level of school attendance.

Young people attend local schools or special schools where appropriate. Solutions have two registered schools which young people in foster homes may attend if the placing authority requests this.

The manager has developed an information system, which demonstrate the educational attainment of the young people placed with them and will demonstrate the numbers excluded from school.

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 has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The agency ensures contact arrangements and agreements are promoted and maintained. The agency promotes consultation with young people.

EVIDENCE:

Discussion with carers and recording in case files demonstrated that foster carers and Solutions ensure appropriate contact between children and their families is maintained and encouraged. Carers felt well supported by Solutions

The requirements for contact are considered at the referral and matching stage and is clarified at the start of placement. Evidence was seen of contact arrangements recorded on FPA's and on young people's files. Feedback on contact was included in review reports and monthly reports written by foster carers. Contact with birth families and friends form part of the foster carers monthly supervision sessions and the children's and young people's 'looked after' (LAC) reviews.

All young people are given a children's guide entitled "Young Person's Welcome Booklet" at the start of placement.

The agency has developed a format for consultation with young people, which takes place on a quarterly basis, which allows young people the opportunity to

express their views regarding the quality of care provided. Case files contained evidence of this consultation.

The agency has acted upon information gained from the consultation process. Children's feed back forms have been amended to be age appropriate and gender specific and have also been amended for children with language difficulties.

Solutions employ support workers to visit and work alongside young people to gain their views and opinions.

All questionnaires bar one, received from children and young people felt they are asked their opinions over day to day matters that effect them.

Details on how to complain are provided in the children's guide. There was evidence of the complaints procedure being used by young people and being acted upon by the manager. The complaints system needs to be promoted by Solutions to enable younger children and those with communication difficulties easily access the complaints procedure.

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):

This outcome area was not assessed.

EVIDENCE:

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):

1,16,17,21,22,24,25

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

The agency has a good number of qualified staff. Foster carers are well supervised and receive a high level of support.

Management systems need to be developed in terms of evaluating service and quality of care and unannounced visits need to be conducted.

EVIDENCE:

Solutions have a statement of purpose, which accurately reflects the service it provides. This needs to record the outcomes of complaints made to the agency.

The manager has developed systems for the collection and monitoring of matters listed in Schedule 7. This needs to be further developed to evidence the evaluation and analysis of the agency's performance to ensure quality of care is provided and improved. A report needs to be supplied to the Commission in respect of any review of the quality of care conducted by the agency in line with Regulation 42.

Staff are organized and managed in a way, which delivers an efficient, and effective foster care service. There are clear lines of accountability, which is known to staff and carers. Managers and staff are accessible to carers and young people.

Solutions employ a sufficient level of qualified and experienced staff. Support workers are allocated to each young person cared for by the agency and visit on a regular basis. Foster carers and young people spoke positively about this service and felt they were an excellent resource.

Carers files and records demonstrated the supervision of foster carers is regular and of a high quality. The supervision form is detailed and covers all relevant areas and sets and reviews the action, which needs to be taken. In discussions with carers and from questionnaires, carers spoke positively about the high level of support they are given from Solutions whenever it is required, i.e. "I don't feel I could get a better agency for support, training and the child's welfare." "brilliant company. I can't fault them in any way".

Feedback from placing authorities demonstrated that a good system of communication between the agency and young people's social workers exists i.e. "service provided by solutions has been excellent and ..progress has been exceptional" "very helpful in all matters. Good liason with children's services."

Solutions uses the BAAF form F to process the assessment of prospective foster carers and uses a set of competencies to measure their skills and

abilities. Some concerns were raised about the quality of some form F's at recent Panel meetings.

Since the last inspection the agency assess all "back up" carers for named young people, which meets the criteria stated in Schedule 3. These carers need to be approved by Panel and be annually reviewed along with the main carers review.

No evidence of annual unannounced visits being conducted to foster carers could be seen. These visits should be conducted and evidenced on foster carer's files.

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care. Case files were well organized and contained an excellent range of information in relation to the continuing needs and progress of the young people. The monthly recording made by foster carers on each young person needs to be filed on the young person's file instead or as well as carers file. The manager should conduct an audit of files on a regular basis.

There is a written policy and guidance on case recording expected of foster carers, which is in the foster carers handbook and given to each foster carer. Electronic records are maintained in addition to paper records.

A record needs to be maintained on each foster carers file of each placement made which states the name, age, sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination, in line with Regulation 30(3) (a).

Since the last inspection the agency has ensured staff and foster carers sign a declaration regarding any possible conflicts of interest.

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	4

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	4
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	X
29	X

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	X
4	2
5	X
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	4
22	2
23	X
24	3
25	3
26	X
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.	FS1	3	The registered manger must include the outcome of any complaint detailed in the statement of purpose	31/08/06
2.	FS4	42(1)(b)	The manager has developed systems for the collection and monitoring of matters listed in Schedule 7. This needs to be further developed to evidence the evaluation and analysis of the agency's performance to ensure quality of care is provided and improved	31/08/06
3	FS4	42(2)	The registered manager must supply to the Commission a report in respect of any review of the quality of foster care provided which is conducted by the agency. A copy of the report must be made available to foster parents, children placed with foster parents and placing authorities. (Timescale of 31/3/06 not met).	30/11/06
4.	FS8	34(3) Sch6	The agency needs to ensure the foster placement agreement (FPA) meets all matters listed in Schedule 6.	31/07/06

5	FS15	20 Sch 1	Solutions must ensure all staff and foster carers renew CRB's every three years.	31/07/06
6	FS25	30 (3) (a)	The registered manager must ensure a record is maintained on each foster carers file of each placement made, which states the name, age, sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination. (Timescale of 30/11/05 not met.)	31/07/06
7	FS30	26(2)	A quality assurance system needs to be developed whereby panel comments are fed back to Solutions manager and action taken to improve quality as a result.	31/08/06
8	FS30	25	The minutes of the fostering panel need to clearly demonstrate panel member's role on panel and which agency foster carers are being assessed and reviewed for.	31/08/06
9	FS30	28	Solutions fostering manager must ensure all foster carers are approved by the agency decision maker before any children or young people are placed with them	30/06/06

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.	FS6	FS25The manager needs to ensure that any remedial action identified by health and safety checks are recorded

		when completed.
2	FS8	The manager needs to develop the matching pro forma and FPA, to better evidence the matching process and demonstrate how any gaps in matching are compensated for.
3	FS11	The complaints system needs to be promoted by Solutions to enable younger children and those with communication difficulties easily access the complaints procedure.
4	FS22	Unannounced visits should be conducted to foster carers at least once a year.
5	FS25	The manager should conduct a regular audit of files.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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