



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd

**Third Floor
33-39 Grey Street
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 6EE**

Lead Inspector
Stephen Smith

Key Announced Inspection
4th December 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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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

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Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	SWIIS Foster Care Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Sarah Anne Rack
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 6th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd. is a national independent agency that provides services to local authority social service departments and the children and young people in their care. This inspection focussed on the regional office based in Newcastle upon Tyne and its sub office based in Darlington. At the time of the inspection, the Service was providing a family placement service to 83 children and young people. The Agency offers a range of services to meet the needs of placing authorities, for example: emergency, parent and child, short-term and long-term placements, as well as shared care placements.

SWIIS Foster Care provides a multi-disciplinary approach to working with children that, amongst other things, offers opportunities for children, foster carers and social work staff to access health and educational support services. In addition to the manager and two operational managers the service employs a principal social worker and 6 fostering social workers, 2 Specialist Health Advisers, 2 Placement Support Workers, a Principal Education Case Worker, 6 Education Caseworkers and an Education Support Worker as well as administrative staff. At the time of the inspection SWIIS was operating the service as a fostering branch based in Newcastle with a 'sub-office' in Darlington but plans to apply to the Commission for Social Care Inspection to register the Darlington office as a fostering branch early in 2007.

SUMMARY

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

The inspectors would like to thank the children, carers and staff of SWIIS Fostering Service for the way they helped the inspectors do their job and find out what the fostering service is like. The inspectors also want to thank children's social workers who filled in forms or who told them what they think of the fostering service. Staff in the fostering team, carers and children spoken to were very helpful and people spent time filling in surveys and sending them to the inspectors before the inspection. Information and facts in this report come from surveys sent to foster carers, fostered children and placing social workers and from written information the manager gave the inspectors as well as from the things seen and the people spoken to when they visited. The inspectors visited three fostering families with children living with them. Surveys were returned from 24 fostered children, 25 foster carers and 26 social workers. Altogether, five inspector days were spent with the fostering team and a further day was spent reading questionnaires and sorting out the information in them.

A team of three inspectors carried out the inspection and gathered information by:

- Talking individually with children and carers;
- Individual and group discussions with fostering staff;
- Individual and group discussions with educational and health staff working for the agency;
- Visiting foster carer's homes;
- Meeting fostered children and young people at an activity they were doing;
- Reading children's, carers' and staff files;
- Reading records;
- Interviewing the manager;
- Studying the surveys and other information sent back to them;
- Reading records of the meetings of the fostering panel.

People who told the inspector what they think about SWIIS Fostering Service said good things. Everyone said that support to foster carers and fostered children is very good and all social workers and foster carers who sent survey forms back said that the service is as good, or better, than it was last year. Very few people said that they thought the service could do anything better. Two foster carers commented about the difficulties they experience if they go a long time without children in placement and one social worker was unhappy that the service has been unable to honour a 28-day notice period. The manager explained to inspectors that the service had thought it would be unsafe to try to stick to this period. Otherwise people were very happy about the agency.

Foster carers said things like:

- "In the 5 years we have fostered for this agency we have found them to be like an extended family with professionalism. The children we have cared for have also been given time to get to know most people that work for the agency giving them more opportunities to help them progress."
- "All of the workers that I have come into contact with have been excellent in providing an outstanding service. They can be very friendly and supportive but never seem to lose sight of what is best for the children and carers."
- "I'm glad I chose to foster with SWIIS; I get the support I need. I don't always feel I'm doing a good job but am always told I am doing a great job."
- "I could not ask to be employed by a better company. I have been with SWIIS for four years and have no complaints at all."

Social workers said:

- "The agency is very supportive of foster carers dealing with children who display challenging and difficult behaviour."
- "Overall the fostering service provides a good service for young people and children. The workers/professionals I have met appear very supportive of the child as well as the carers."
- "SWIIS have, in this instance, provided (young person) with a good placement that is professionally and effectively supported by SWIIS workers."
- "I have found SWIIS to be an exceptional agency. They support the carers and children (and social worker at times.) I feel safe knowing that my allocated children are with them; I would not hesitate placing other children with them!"

Practically all carers said they get excellent support, training and advice and said the staff are friendly, approachable and child focussed. Social workers said the same sorts of things and said they have good working relationships with the staff and management of SWIIS.

Most importantly children said good things about the service and their foster carers like:

- "My (foster) parents are wonderful."
- "I have moved up a class at college. I have a nice family."
- "(Foster carers) should be given a medal because they work so hard to help young people like me and (name.) They have been so inspiring to me."

What the service does well:

There are a lot of things that the fostering service does well:

- It is very good at making sure that it gets and keeps foster carers that are the right sort of people to look after children, it makes sure that these people have homes and cars that are safe and that they care for

children in the right way. Children said things about their foster carers like, "(Carer names) are the best carers so don't diss!", "They're mint!" and "I am loved here and (carer's) family brought me in with open arms and treat me just like part of the family."

- It is good at making sure that children get to live with foster carers who are right for them and will look after them how they want and need. This is called matching and social workers and foster carers said the agency is very good at this, a social worker said, "The foster carers are very committed to (young person) and as such have enabled her to have stability" and a young person said, "My (foster) parents are wonderful."
- The fostering panel, that is the group of experts that consider whether new foster carers are the right sort of person to foster children, make good decisions and recommendations about who should be able to foster children.
- The fostering service gives foster carers very good support and good training so that they can make sure that children are getting looked after well.
- The agency is very good at thinking about any events that happen to children such as restraints, accidents or running away and any complaints or allegations made about foster carers. A 'critical incidents panel' that has people who don't work for the agency on it discuss any incidents to make sure the right things were done about them and to see what lessons can be learned.
- The service is very good at making sure that children get the right help to stay healthy and get any help they need to get and keep well. It has nurses who work for it who work with children, their carers and people from the local authority who look after the child. A young person said. "I get advice about habit issues and smoking."
- The service is also very good at making sure children get a good education. It has teachers and education support workers who work for it, who help children do the best they can at school. This is important as it helps children do well as they grow up. Children said things like, "I have just getting an apprenticeship," "They are helping me to get my qualifications" and "I have already planned my future as going into the army and then when I come out get training for a sparky."

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the agency has:

- Got better at checking out new staff that come to work for it to make sure that they are the right sort of people to work with children. It finds out more about the jobs they have done before and why they left them and talks to the people who wrote their references to check if there is anything else that they want to say.
- The service has made sure that all foster carers get permission written down from children's social workers for any special health care 'treatment' they give to children.

What they could do better:

There are not many things that this inspection has found that the service should do better. The most important are:

- It must follow the rules about how many children that foster carers can foster at the same time and make sure that if foster carers ever care for more than three children who are not all brothers or sisters, even just for respite care, that they get permission from the local authority where the foster carer lives.
- A 'safe care policy' showing how a foster carer is going to look after a child in a way that is safe for the child and carer should be written down for each foster placement and checked out with the child's social worker to make sure it is right.
- The service should write down the Criminal Records Bureau checks (that are done on foster carers to make sure they are the right sort of people to look after children) better. It should do this so it can make sure that the right checks were done.
- Some children said that they are not visited very often by their social worker. The service should talk to children's social workers to see how children can get to talk to someone who does not work for the fostering service if they need to.
- The service should make sure that it gets all the paperwork about children from their social workers so that foster carers and staff helping children know as much as possible about children's needs and can give the best help possible.

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:

12

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

Children's physical and emotional health needs are very well met and promoted by the fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service places a priority on meeting and promoting children's health needs. Comprehensive and detailed health records are kept and the agency's two health caseworkers work hard with carers to ensure that children get appropriate health care. These workers also work directly with young people where necessary and liaise closely with medical professionals and the Looked After Children's (LAC) Nurses from children's placing authorities. The health case workers are effective in gaining and sharing necessary health information about children and ensuring that needs are addressed.

Case tracking during the inspection provided examples of where this work had been of benefit to fostered children and their carers. A great deal of evidence was also available of high levels of support for children's emotional and psychological health and access to therapeutic services where needed. Children visited were appropriately registered with doctors and dentists.

Foster carers get good training in health issues including first aid, mental health, attachment, self harm and drug awareness. Foster carers can also access training and support on an individual basis as necessary based on the need of the child being cared for. Commendably, assessments of prospective foster carers have, where necessary, input from one of the health case workers alongside the assessing social workers to ensure that any health issues are

fully addressed and advice is available about applicants' ability to meet children's health needs.

Foster carers and social workers views about how well the service supports foster carers to meet children's health needs were as follows:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	60%	44%
Good	40%	56%
Adequate	0%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carers said things like:

- "We get good medical advice in all health issues."
- "They promote regular medical and dental check-ups. They also advise on nutrition and encourage children to join after school activities."
- "The agency provides a nurse so children and carers can enquire about any health issues."
- "The service's health team is always available to advise and guide us and young people in or care."

Social workers comments included:

- "Encouragement is given re diet/activity/staying safe and healthy."
- "Individual foster carers ensure that (young person) has exercise and a balanced diet."
- "No effort is spared by SWIIS and the foster carer in engendering a positive and healthy lifestyle."

65% children consulted said they 'always' get the right help and advice with their health, 24% said they 'usually' get this help and 11% said 'sometimes'. Children's said things like:

- "(Carer names) always give me advice about health and safety and how to keep me fit."
- "Healthy packed lunch every day."
- "I get advice about habit issues and smoking."
- "We go to the dentist every six months."
- "I get help with my eating because I like junk food."
- "(Carer) helps me understand information about being healthy."

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):

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.

Children's safety is promoted by effective matching arrangements and the provision of safe homes with foster carers who get good training in keeping children safe. The service demonstrates a commitment to promoting children's safety and monitors its own work in this area very well. Recruitment practices are rigorous and the fostering panel carefully considers the suitability of prospective foster carers and makes good recommendations to the decision maker.

EVIDENCE:

All foster carers visited as part of the inspection process made the inspectors welcome and cooperated fully with the inspection process. The homes visited were comfortable and suitable environments in which to bring up children. Children consulted were very pleased with their home. Good health and safety checklists were in place in all the files examined; these contained thorough checks of home safety and included checks on car MOT and registration documents as well as driving licence and insurance details. These checklists were all up-to-date as were pet safety questionnaires where needed. Carers

visited were aware of safety issues, one family had put innovative methods in place to ensure children's safety when using the computer and on-line.

All parties consulted during the inspection said that the agency takes great care to match children with suitable carers. Case tracking during the inspection produced evidence of careful matching. Although two placements had been made in an 'emergency' and foster carers said that the placing authority had not been able to provide much information they said that the agency had worked hard to get as much information as possible for the carer about the child's needs. In planned placements carers said that introductions had taken place and information provided had been very good. It is evident that the agency has good systems in place to seek as much information as is available from the child's placing authority though some LAC documentation was not in place in foster carers' files. Good information handover sheets are used providing respite carers with detailed information about the young person provided from their main carer prior to any respite care stays.

Foster carers' views, expressed in questionnaires, about the quality of information they receive before placements are made were positive and reflected the inspection findings:

Excellent	35%
Good	39%
Adequate	18%
Poor	8%

Placing social workers consulted were very positive about the quality of information they receive back from the fostering service and foster carers:

Excellent	44%
Good	66%
Adequate	0%
Inadequate	0%

Views of foster carers and social workers about how good the fostering service is at promoting placement stability were generally positive with foster carers feeling particularly well supported in this area:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	55%	39%
Good	45%	44%
Adequate	0%	17%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Social workers and foster carers were also positive about the support given to foster carers to make sure children are well cared for:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	63%	44%
Good	37%	48%
Adequate	0%	8%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Comments from foster carers about matching included:

- "We've always had the information we needed."
- "If any information is not clear the agency works fast on finding out if they don't have the answers."
- "We had a lot of information and contact which helped in our decision."
- Information from local authorities tends to come after the child has been placed, not before."
- "I'm sure that you don't always get the full story but this information should come from social services, we get everything that SWIIS gets."
- "The agency always try to make the move without any upsets for the child or the carer."
- "With good support from the service I know that any placement I receive is suitable to myself and the child."
- "They promote respite and holidays for re-charging batteries. There is lots of ongoing training to help carers cope with difficult situations."

Comments from social workers included:

- "I receive regular reports re education and placement matters and feel this is an area of SWIIS's work which has improved over the past year or so."
- "This placement has been an excellent addition to the overall plan for (young person.)"
- "SWIIS support the carer and child at all times."
- "The foster carers are very committed to (young person) and as such have enabled her to have stability."
- "(Young person's" foster placement with SWIIS has achieved its objective to bring stability to his life."

Case tracking during the inspection identified a situation in which carers approved for three young people had, on two occasions, had a fourth child placed for respite care. This situation had been thought out considering the needs of the children concerned but placing a fourth child for a period of respite had placed the foster home over the 'usual fostering limit' of three children (unless all siblings) set out in the Children Act 1989 as no exemption from this limit had been sought from the local authority in which the foster carer lives. The agency explained that this situation was an oversight and showed that such an exemption had been sought, however for another situation in which more than three children were placed with foster carers. The agency must, however, ensure that an exemption from this limit is sought

for every situation in which more than three children who are not all siblings are placed with a foster carer.

One young person told an inspector that she felt treated less favourably than the foster carers own children and that in the past had been moved from placements when she had had problems rather than the difficulties being addressed. This was an isolated view, however, and the possible reasons behind it were discussed with the fostering service.

Foster carers are provided with good training in areas relating to protecting children such as child protection, bullying, behaviour management, internet mobile phone use, self harm and so on. The agency has well developed policies and procedures in place and provides good information for carers. Supervising social workers ensure that foster carers are well supported, monitored and managed to ensure that are caring for children well. A fostering couple visited during the inspection had developed a system to monitor the computer use of the older children placed with them.

The agency keeps detailed records of any restraint that takes place on a child, allegation, complaint or incident and monitors these effectively to identify any patterns or trends. Records of complaints and allegations showed that the few received had been dealt with effectively with the appropriate notifications made and actions taken. The agency has developed a 'critical incident panel' made up of managers and independent representatives from the fostering panel. This panel meets regularly to monitor and analyse the circumstances of and actions taken in response to allegations, restraints and incidents to ensure that they were handled properly and any lessons learned. This is very good practice and the agency is to be commended for this development.

The fostering service has an effective system of undertaking Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on foster carers with checks being carried out pre-approval and updated every three years. In one case tracked situation the CRB evidence sheets contained the disclosure number but were not signed by the manager and did not included level of check though all other checks examined were at enhanced level. It is recommended that the level of disclosure and confirmation that the check related to working with children is recorded and the record is signed by the person sighting the disclosure.

Foster carers have developed safe care policies for their homes that were done at the time of their approval. These policies are, therefore, general rather than specific to the needs of the child currently placed. Safer caring risk assessments are developed for each placement but these documents do not cover all the areas needed in a safe care policy. Additionally, the safe caring policies seen contained statements about care practice that were unlikely to be appropriate in other than extreme situations where individual agreements would be necessary. Safe care policies should be developed for each placement

based on the child's individual needs and agreed with the placing social workers.

88% of young people said in their survey forms that they 'always' feel well cared for where they are living with 10% saying they 'usually' feel well for. One young person answered 'sometimes' saying "They (foster carers) are very nice to me but I do struggle sometimes because I don't get money that often from my foster carers. I have to rely on EMA (Educational Maintenance Allowance) from college." Other young people said,

- "(Carer names) are the best carers so don't diss!"
- "I am well fed and always have new clothes."
- "I have got my own bedroom and get lots of care."
- "Because she feeds me and puts me to bed so I get my sleep."
- "Because I am loved here and (carer's) family brought me in with open arms and treat me just like part of the family."
- "I feel safe with my carers."
- "My carers think about us all the time."
- "I'm comfortable and I know them very well."
- "Because they're mint!"

Young people said that they know who to speak to if they have a problem and all older children said that they know how to make a complaint if they feel it necessary.

- "I have been taught throughout my life to speak to people and never let my thoughts take over."
- "I have my social worker, school, parents, mentor."
- "Everyone's there for me 24/7."
- "Speak to my ACAS mentor or to my social worker or to my (foster mum and dad.)"
- "Foster carers and social worker."
- "If I need to speak to someone I speak to my foster carers or their daughters if I have any problems."
- "I would always talk to (foster carer) because whatever I had to say she would talk about it with me."

Only four young people who returned surveys said that they were being bullied and all said that it happens at school. Names and details were passed to the fostering service to deal with who were already aware of three of the situations and told inspectors of the action being taken to resolve the children's problems.

Recruitment files examined of staff members appointed since the last inspection were in good order and demonstrated that a robust and well recorded recruitment procedure is operated with effective checks and references being sought. Records clearly demonstrated that action has been taken to address the issues noted at the last inspection. Full employment

histories of applicants are sought along with the reasons for leaving previous posts working with children and good records of verbal follow-up of written references are maintained.

The fostering service operates an effective panel that employs structured processes and keeps good records of its decisions and how it reaches them. Decisions and recommendations made are clear and the agency decision maker makes a decision promptly bearing in mind the panel recommendation; good records of these decisions and panel minutes are maintained on foster carers' files. Panel is correctly constituted in line with the regulations and national minimum standards.

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):

7, 13 and 31

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

Children are provided with care and services that reflect their individual needs. Children get extremely high levels of support with their education.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has an equal opportunities policy in place. The foster carer agreement includes the requirement of foster carers to meet the needs of young people as set out in their care plan and this covers diversity issues. The agency's foster carer assessment process and initial training for prospective carers covers equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice and considers their attitudes, knowledge and abilities to work with children from different backgrounds and with different needs and to promote diversity. Ongoing training in diversity issues is provided for foster carers. The ethnic background of the service's foster carers is predominantly white British as is the background of the great majority of children placed. The service does, however have foster carers and fostered children from other backgrounds and is seeking to develop further in this area. Discussion with foster carers and questionnaires from young people, foster carers and social workers showed that carers are supported to work to support young people's individual needs and good training is provided to foster carers based on these individual needs.

Foster carers and social workers views about how good the service is at supporting foster carers with issues relating to diversity were as follows:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	72%	32%
Good	28%	64%
Adequate	0%	4%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carers comments about the support provided included:

- "The agency works together with the children and carers to make the correct environment for all."
- I have attended training and workshops dedicated to these subjects which I found very beneficial."
- I've been on training days that have been really interesting and enjoyable about culture awareness. I'm due to go on a course in the next week about disability.

Social workers said things like:

- "Meets the needs of (young person) who is disabled well."
- Foster carers have sought out specialist input re hair and skin care and "have taken the child to a specialist hairdresser."

SWIIS Foster care Ltd places an extremely high priority on ensuring that children receive a good education. The service employs six 'Education Case Workers' and a 'Principal Education Case Worker' who are all qualified teachers as well as an education support worker. Staff members spoken to said that education case workers are involved in foster carer assessments to help assess applicant's abilities to promote children's educational achievement and this was confirmed in assessments examined. A number of people also told inspectors how educational facilities are a key factor when considering placement matches for children as the service would not place a child with foster carers unless the local area had appropriate educational resources.

Records examined contained detailed information about the child's education, needs, achievements and support provided. Foster carers visited described very high levels of educational support for fostered children. One carer said, "One of the young people we cared for was excluded from school unexpectedly, we phoned SWIIS and within 20 minutes an educational worker came out with homework for the child, helped them work, took it away, marked it and brought more the next day. It was two weeks before the local authority got someone to come out." Two young people had been successful in gaining an apprenticeship after leaving school and foster carers said that a lot of support had been provided by the agency to achieve this.

The service liaises closely with schools and local education services to ensure that children are supported in schools and get appropriate help, educational

case workers support carers and young people in Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings and a very high proportion of young people fostered by the service have up-to-date PEPs. Levels of achievement of the 11 children who sat their GCSE's in 2006 were good with 7 young people achieving at least 2 GCSEs and 5 achieving 7 or over despite four of the young people having a statement of special educational need. The remaining four young people achieved other successes. Full details of these achievements are not reported here to preserve confidentiality but this level of achievement is worthy of commendation both for the young people themselves and the support provided by the agency.

Young people's views about whether they get the right support with their education and to think about their future were as follows:

	Education	Future
Always	61%	67%
Usually	31%	25%
Sometimes	8%	4%(1 response)
Never	0%	4% (1 response)

Children said things about their education like:

- "They (foster carers) help me with my homework"
- "All the teachers at school try their best to get my work right."
- "If I'm stuck on anything they will always hep me."
- "I get help from (foster carers) and (worker) comes and helps us do our homework."
- "Don't want to go to school but they send me work and stuff."
- "My carer wants the best for me and my life."
- "I have just getting an apprenticeship."
- "No one's asked me what I want to do in the future."
- "They are helping me to get my qualifications."
- "I have already planned my future as going into the army and then when I come out get training for a sparky."
- "(Foster) mum and dad are helping me to stay here."
- "I never have social workers off my back helping me stick in at school."
- "I talk about my future at my reviews that I have at home at school."
- "(Foster carers) are always telling me that what I do now will affect my future and they are always advising me."

Foster carers' and social workers' views about the quality of educational support provided by the agency were extremely positive.

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	68%	67%
Good	20%	33%
Adequate	12%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

They were also positive about support for children to be able to undertake activities in the community:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	68%	62%
Good	20%	31%
Adequate	12%	7%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Views about how well the fostering service supports foster carers to provide an environment in which the child can prosper were also very positive:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	58%	59%
Good	38%	41%
Adequate	4%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carers' comments about 'Enjoying and Achieving' included:

- "I have a designated teacher who works alongside me to obtain the best results for the child. He liaises with the school on behalf of the child."
- "The education team are very quick to act and work closely with schools to maintain placements this is done through monitoring and not just solving problems when they arise."
- "We have lots of support from the education team. They come to all meetings and even do after school study."
- "The agency offers summer outings for the children and help us help the children find suitable activities for them."
- "The child placed is encouraged to take part in local activities but often they refuse or lose interest."
- "We are given a good wage so we can afford to make sure that the child gets plenty of activities. This is monitored in daily reports and my link worker regularly asks what the kids have been up to."
- "Education, link and support workers are very good at assessing a need and then filling that need with positive and constructive programs."
- "The service provides transport and trips out that are fun and educational for my child. And regular training for me too."

Social worker's comments included:

- "One-to-one support provided both within the school environment and the foster placement."
- "No effort is spared by SWIIS to obtain the best education for the young person in their respective educational establishments."
- "(Young person) has her own education worker who attends school and provides support."
- "Specialist education case worker is available who is very proactive in his involvement."

- "Every holiday activities are planned."
- "(Young person) has had many opportunities organised and facilitated by SWIIS during the course of his placement."

The special requirements of children and families who use the short break fostering service provided by the agency are reflected through its policies and procedures. Clear arrangements are in place to ensure that children's families maintain responsibility for the children's upbringing and systems are in place to provide them with clear detailed information about their children's care and activities whilst they are receiving a short break.

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):

10 and 11

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

Children get good help to maintain contact with their families and develop friendships and links with the community. Children's views are listened to and responded to by the agency and its carers.

EVIDENCE:

The importance of promoting appropriate contact between young people and their families is set out in the foster care agreement and stressed in the foster carers' handbook. Foster carers spoken to during the inspection told inspectors about the work they do to support contact and the help they receive from the fostering team. Evidence was available of good work being undertaken to maintain contact between children and their families. The service's foster placement agreements contain information about the arrangements and responsibilities for contact and social workers and fostering workers said that these arrangements are discussed at the placement agreement meetings.

Foster carers all reported that children have good networks with friends and within the community and carers who responded said that all the children they care for have good links with their families wherever this is possible. One foster carer said that contact with family is disappointing for the child because of difficulties with contact but said that all parties are trying hard to improve this. Social workers were also very positive about children's networks with family, friends and the community with none expressing the view that

children's networks are poor. One social worker said, "Foster carers have developed an excellent relationship with parents – non-judgemental."

The fostering service arranges activities and outings for fostered and birth children and their carers and has run a number of groups for children. Items of artwork undertaken by children that were produced within these groups are displayed within the agency's office. The agency has operated a group for fostered children who were not attending school in order to promote educational activities and address any attendance issues. At the time of the inspection this group, which took place during the day was being discontinued as there are few children not attending school. An evening group is consequently being formed and, as part of the inspection, an inspector attended the first of these group meetings. Some young people expressed the view that the activities at this meeting were too young for the needs of the children attending though the service pointed out that the group will take time to develop and adjust to the preferences of children attending. There was additional evidence of outings and trips for foster families and children taking place.

The service provides young people with a great deal of support from supervising social workers, placement support workers, education case and support workers and health case workers. These staff spend a lot of time with young people and seek and respond to their views on an ongoing basis. The service should consider how it can capture and record the views of young people gained in this manner. Clear arrangements are in place for seeking fostered young people's and foster carers' own children's views for foster carers' reviews as well as looked after children's own reviews and planning meetings.

In survey forms children generally said they know who to speak to if they have a problem and the older children know how to make a complaint. Children said they are listened to and their opinions taken notice of by their foster carers and, most of the time, by their social workers. Their responses were as follows:

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Foster carer:	79%	16%	5%	0%
Social worker:	44%	28%	20%	8%

Children said things like:

- "My carer always listens but does not always agree but does tell me why."
- "My carers listen, they are good listeners."
- "If I ever need to speak to someone I know (carer's) there for me and listens."
- "(Social worker) is a really good social worker and she listens to me and my brother and carers."

- "My social worker listens when she can."
- "That is what their job is." (Said about social worker)
- "Whenever I want to say anything my social worker will listen to me. She helped me move here."

Some young people did, however, feel that they do not see their own social worker enough to be properly listened to:

- "She does not come round usually."
- "I haven't got a social worker that can listen to me."
- "Don't see my social worker very often."
- "I don't hardly see my social worker and my requests only sometimes get dealt with."
- "She is never here but (foster carers') social worker helps me all the time and listens to me."

Discussion with supervising social workers during the inspection showed that the agency works with placing authorities to ensure that children are visited by their social workers. In the light of these views from young people, however, it is recommended that the agency discuss with local authorities how children who are not often visited by their social workers can have access to someone independent of the fostering agency to talk to.

Foster carers and social workers were very positive in their responses about how well children are consulted about their lives and their care:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	58%	76%
Good	34%	24%
Adequate	8%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

They also generally thought that arrangements for consulting children about the running of the service were effective:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	32%	0%
Good	42%	80%
Adequate	26%	20%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carers made comments about consultation with children including:

- "Carers are actively encouraged to involve young people in decisions and link workers provide good advice around this area."
- "SWIIS do involve the children in decisions. With SWIIS the children are paramount and they try to build a friendly relationship with them."

- "The kids are treated with great respect by all members of staff. They are asked if they can do anything to help or anything they want to know."
- "The agency often asks the children for their views and encourages them to take part in various activities, eg. Newsletters, calendars."
- "They have helped children with anger management including them in planning."

Social workers said things like:

- "I do not always see the full extent and efforts made in engaging with the child/young person though I do feel this is addressed positively."
- "(Young person) is listened to by the carers and care is given on the basis of her needs, she is definitely a part of the plan."

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):

29

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

Foster carers receive payments that allow them to care properly for the child placed with them.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has structured arrangements in place regarding payments to foster carers. All foster carers were contacted by questionnaire as part of the inspection and none raised any issues relating to the level of payments or the arrangements for them to be made. One foster carers raised, in a survey form, the issue of the 'retainer' fee paid to carers when they don not have a child in placement and expressed the view that four weeks retainer is not long enough. No other carer expressed this view however and other evidence gained during the inspection showed that the arrangements in place are carefully thought out and monitored.

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):

1, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 32

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

The service is excellent at assessing, managing and reviewing and supporting children and this helps to promotes excellent outcomes for children.

EVIDENCE:

Evidence from questionnaires, case tracking and examination of records showed that the service has the policies, procedures and systems in place to work effectively to provide good care for children. Effective arrangements for staff supervision are in place and the level of administrative and clerical support is appropriate for the size of the agency. Staff members spoken to said that they are well supported and able to do their jobs well. They said that they are able to tell managers if they are 'overstretched' and will receive help and support. Independent social workers are employed if necessary to manage peaks of workload, particularly to carry out new assessments of foster carers. Fostering social workers said that they receive good training, one said that after two years in post she still feels like she is on a "luxury yacht" of training.

Assessments seen during the inspection were detailed and thorough and the service has an effective system in place to ensure that CRB disclosures, medicals and other checks are done promptly as required. Assessments seen included good examination and analysis of the suitability, experience and competencies of people being assessed to be foster carers. In one situation one of the agency's health case workers (a qualified nurse and social worker) had co-worked an assessment of a new foster carers where a potential health issue existed. All new assessments contain input from education case workers to assess applicants' suitability and competencies at promoting children's educational achievement. Records of visits to the referees of applicants to be foster carers were appropriate but, as they were not signed by the referee, it was not possible to verify their accuracy. It is recommended that reports of visits to referees are shown to the referee and their signatures gained to ensure that they are full and accurate reports of what the referee said. Foster carers consulted said that they considered their assessments to be very thorough but sensitively carried out. Foster carers are issued with a certificate to mark their approval and one couple said that this was very much appreciated.

The agency has a very effective process for managing foster carers' reviews. Records of reviews were very comprehensive and detailed and demonstrated very good consultation with all parties including fostered children and the carer's own children, the placing and supervising social workers and health and education case workers as well as the foster carer. Commendably the forms used to seek young people's views for foster carers' reviews are designed to relate to the specific circumstances of the child and placement. Foster carers' reviews are taken to the fostering panel for consideration and carers receive a clear notification about the outcome of the review and their continuing terms of approval.

Evidence gathered during the inspection demonstrated that carers receive high levels of support and regular visits from their supervising social workers and from health and education case workers where appropriate. This was confirmed by responses in foster carers' survey forms in which 64% of carers said they receive 'excellent' support from the agency to care for the young people and 36% said the support is 'good'.

Carers' comments about this level of support included,

- "The support is always there when I need it."
- "SWIIS have an excellent 24 hour support team and training programmes."
- "The support is excellent from my fostering service. I receive help if it's needed and I know I can pick up a phone and call them at any time."
- "I get training that covers every aspect of fostering, they answer questions and provide out of hours back-up."
- "SWIIS provide a very good support package to carers. I have never felt alone in caring for a young person."
- "When I have trouble with the girl I have placed with me at present I ring whoever is on duty. They talk me through what to do; I find them a great support."
- "Staff at SWIIS are just like friends."

This level of satisfaction from carers about the support received is commendable. Arrangements for the supervision of foster carers are effective with very frequent well recorded supervision sessions being noted. The record of foster carers' supervision follows the five outcomes for children set out in Every Child Matters and also includes foster carers' support, professional development and training needs. Records showed that generally foster carers receive unannounced visits at least annually from their supervising social workers though in one case tracked situation records did not demonstrate that that there had been an unannounced visit since April 2005. The service should ensure that all carers receive unannounced visits from their supervising social workers at least annually and that these visits are clearly recorded in foster carers' files. Foster carers visited were very satisfied with the arrangements for their support and supervision; one carer said "I can't think of anything negative that we've ever come across."

The fostering service has a well developed training programme for foster carers in place. The service has some foster carers with NVQ 3 in child care and others undertaking this qualification and has plans to develop this further. Many carers are undertaking either induction or foundation level training in child care. In house training courses are provided and some training activity takes place at foster carers' support group meetings alongside support activity. Training is provided to foster carers in topics such as education, health, attachment, drugs, child protection, behaviour management, bullying, first aid, mental health, self harm, leaving care and so on. It is clear that the service is working hard to encourage the take up of training by all carers, has identified

those carers who undertake less training and is working individually with these people to identify and address any reasons.

Files examined during the inspection demonstrated that the service generally receives and maintains good LAC documentation about the children it places with foster carers. The fostering service's own recording both by foster carers and staff is very comprehensive and there is excellent recording of the educational work carried out with children and their academic achievements. Generally the agency gets good information for carers to work with about the child, one file examined contained the young person's LAC Care Plan, copies of all reviews, a regularly updated PEP and evidence of regular annual medical checks. A Pathway Plan was in place and a report from the child's guardian also contained good information though there was no copy of the child's Placement Plan or Essential Record. The agency's own placement agreement was in place.

In the file of another young person the LAC Care Plan was dated from before the child had been placed with the current carers. The plan on file was for adoption but it was evident from review records that this plan had been changed to long-term fostering. It is important that the agency has the correct information about children placed and it should continue to work with placing authorities to ensure that full and accurate LAC documentation is retained for all children.

The agency's general record keeping is effective with good records of the manager's monitoring of matters set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and those matters requiring notification under the above regulations. Staff records are comprehensive as are foster carers' records and training and education records are excellent.

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	3
8	3
9	3
15	3
30	3

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

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

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

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

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
1	FS8	28, 34 Children Act 1989 Sec 63(12)	The fostering service must ensure that foster carers do not care for more children than the usual fostering limit without a certificate of exemption being in place from the relevant local authority.	26/01/07

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	FS9	Records of CRB disclosures should be signed by the person sighting the disclosure and state the level and nature of the check carried out.
2	FS9	Safe care policies should be developed for each placement based on the child's individual needs and agreed with the placing social workers.
3	FS11	The service should develop a system for capturing and recording the views of young people that are gained in the day-to-day informal consultation that takes place with them.
4	FS11	It is recommended that the agency discuss with local

		authorities how children who are not often visited by their social workers can have access to someone independent of the fostering agency to talk to.
5	FS17	It is recommended that reports of visits to the referees for people being assessed as foster carers are shown to the referees and their signatures gained to ensure that they are full and accurate reports of what the referee said.
6	FS22	The service should ensure that all carers receive unannounced visits from their supervising social workers at least annually and that these visits are clearly recorded in foster carers' files.
7	FS24	The service should continue to work with placing authorities to ensure that full and accurate LAC documentation is retained for all children.

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