

inspection report

Fostering Services

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd

Third Floor

33-39 Grey Street

Newcastle Upon Tyne

NE1 6EE

23rd February 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd

Tel No

0191 230 5283

Address

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

Fax No

Email Address

info@swiis.com

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Ms Sarah Anne Rack

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

24/2/03

Date of Inspection Visit		23rd February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Dennis Bradley	074426
Name of Inspector	2	Glynis Gaffney	074449
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Ms S Rack	

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.
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 which, with its sub office based in Shildon, Durham, provides short and long-term family placements to children and young people in the North East of England. At the time of the inspection, the Service was providing a family placement service to 49 children/young people. In addition to social work and administrative staff, the Service also employs a specialist Health Advisor, a Foster Carer Support Worker and four Education Case Workers.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This is the report of an announced inspection.

The purpose of the inspections is:

- a) to assess progress made towards meeting requirements and recommendations (where applicable) from the previous inspection.
- b) To assess the service against the National Minimum Standards all of which will be covered between the two statutory inspections required each year

Standard 1 - Statement of Purpose

This Standard was met

The Fostering Service has a written Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide.

Standards 2 and 3 - Fitness to Carry on or Manage a Fostering Service.

Both of these standards were met.

It was evident that the Head of Foster Care had appropriate skills and experience and she had commenced training leading to the award of the NVQ Level 5 in Management.

Standards 4 and 5 - Management of the Fostering Service

1 of these standards was met and the other was almost met.

There were established lines of communication and accountability between management, staff and carers. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The deputy Head of Foster Care provides cover in the Head of Foster Care's absence. A formal system to monitor those elements of the Service set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 should be put in place.

Standards 6 to 14 - Securing and Promoting Welfare

8 of these 9 standards were met and the other was almost met.

The assessment process for new foster carers is comprehensive and thorough and includes a health and safety check. There was evidence that the specific needs of children and young people are given consideration when foster placements are arranged. Training for carers includes courses on Child Protection, Safe Caring and Valuing Diversity. The Agency works employs four educational resource workers who support children and young people to meet their educational needs, this includes the provision of one to one support where appropriate. Written guidance was in place stipulating what the Agency's expectations are in terms of carers preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. Foster placement agreements must be completed in respect of all placements and must include all of the information specified in Schedule 6 to Regulation 34 (3) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Standards 15 to 23 - Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers.

5 of these 9 standards were met and 4 were nearly met.

The Agency's recruitment and selection procedures were being revised to ensure that they

comply with the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Service Regulations. Arrangements had been put in place for police checks to be renewed every three years in respect of all people who work for in or for the Agency. Staff had regular team meetings and a formal system of supervision was in place for all staff. A system was in place to provide regular supervision to foster carers. Each foster carer receives a copy of the Service's Policies and Procedures for Foster carers. All carers are required to attend a course of training prior to their approval and they have access to a programme of ongoing training. A plan for the training and development of staff should be prepared and implemented. Foster carers praised the level of support they received from the Agency's staff - this includes an out of hours on call system and paid respite care. A system for the annual appraisal of staff should be implemented.

Standards 24 and 25 - Records

1 of these 2 standards was fully met.

There were written policies regarding case recording. Foster carers confirmed that they knew why a child is placed with them and the basis for the placement. Childrens' and Foster Carers' Registers were in place. Staff personnel records must contain all of the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service regulations 2002.

Standard 26 - Fitness of Premises for use as a Fostering Service

This standard was met.

The premises were adequate for the operation of the Service and suitably equipped. Meetings of the Fostering Panel are held in a different venue.

Standards 27 to 29 - Financial Requirements

1 of these standards was not assessed and the other 2 were met.

Standard 27 had been assessed as part of the registration of the Responsible Individual for the organisation. Financial procedures were in place for staff at the Agency and its accounts are maintained and audited by a registered accountant. Staff at the head office in London are responsible for the overall control and supervision of the Agency's financial affairs. Arrangements were in place for the prompt payment of foster carer allowances and these are reviewed annually.

Standard 30 - Fostering Panels

This standard was nearly met.

The Agency's Fostering Panel was observed to work thoroughly and effectively. However, there were delays in some of the reports of foster carer reviews being received by the Panel and there had also been delays in recommendations made by the Panel being ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. The Panel should be provided with the information required to enable it to carry out all of its functions.

Standard 31 - Short Term Breaks

This standard was nearly met.

Policies and procedures need to be prepared and implemented to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Standard 32 - Family and Friends as Carers

This standard was not applicable.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	42	FS4	Establish and maintain a system for: - Monitoring those matters set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 at appropriate intervals; - and improving the quality of foster care provided by the Agency.	
2	34	FS8	Ensure that placement agreements contain all the information specified in Schedule 6 to Regulation 34(3) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	
3	12 & 18	FS25	Ensure that a system is in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of records.	
4	22 & 31	FS25	Amend the Register of Foster Carers to ensure that it contains all the details specified Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations. Ensure that a record is maintained in respect of all staff working for the Agency that includes all the details specified in Regulation 22 (Schedule2) of the Fostering Services Regulations.	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Dennis Bradley	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Glynis Gaffney	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	Fiona Millns	Signature	_____
Date	23 February 2004		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	42	FS4	Establish and maintain system for: - Monitoring those matters set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 at appropriate intervals; and - Improving the quality of foster care provided by the Agency.	30/8/04
2	34	FS8	Ensure that foster placement agreements contain all the information specified in Schedule 6 to Regulation 34(3) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	30/8/04
3	20, 22, 30, & 31	FS15FS25	Ensure that a system is in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of records. Amend the Register of Foster Carers to ensure that it contains all the details specified Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Ensure that a record is maintained in respect of all staff working for the Agency that includes all the details specified in Regulation 22 (Schedule2) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Ensure that staff personnel records contain all the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002	30/8/04

4	21	FS20	Ensure that: • Staff receive regular, planned appraisals from their line manager; • All staff who come into contact with foster carers and prospective foster carers receive regular management supervision.	30/9/04
5	18	FS22	Ensure that a record is maintained of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation.	30/7/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS8	Foster Placement Agreements should include reference to the elements of matching taken into consideration when agreeing the placement and of any actions required to compensate for identified gaps. When placements are being considered on the basis of limited information Swiis Foster Care, in collaboration with the placing authority's social worker, should carry out a recorded risk assessment and review the foster carer's safe caring policy. This should help ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to enable the carer to provide appropriate care to the child and to protect the foster child, their own children and any other children for whom they have responsibility. In addition, when placement support workers are 'lone working' a recorded risk assessment should be carried out in relation to the numbers and mix of children and young people that can be safely cared for at any one time.
2	FS15	Ensure that the Agency's Recruitment and Selection Policies and Procedures are amended to comply with the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Staff members' files should contain evidence of a verbal follow up being made in respect of all written references and the recruitment policy should be amended to this effect.
3	FS19	Prepare and implement a clear plan in respect of the training and development of staff to cover induction, post qualifying and in-service training. Review and update this at least annually.

4	FS25	Prepare and implement a written policy and procedures in respect of access to confidential information and ensure that foster carers, foster children and their parents know the nature of the records maintained and how to access them.
5	FS13	Ensure that Foster Placement Agreements include, where appropriate, the details specified in Standards 13.4 and 13.8. of the NMS.
6	FS22	Ensure that supervising social workers carry out occasional unannounced visits to foster carers, at least one each year. Consideration should be given to preparing a separate recording format for, and guidance regarding the purpose and focus of, such visits.
7	FS30	In view of the Deputy Head of the Fostering Service's role in supervising those social workers who complete the foster carer assessments for the Agency, it is recommended that their role as a panel member should be reviewed. Consideration should be given to amending the Fostering Panel procedures to include timescales in relation to when carers annual review reports should be submitted to Panel, and when the Panel's recommendations should have received consideration and, where appropriate ratification, by the Agency Decision Maker. In addition, the procedures would benefit from including clear guidance in relation to when carers should be allowed to resign and when they should have to undergo a process of de-registration. Ensure that the Fostering Panel receives all the relevant information regarding the placement needs of children to enable it to carry out its monitoring role, as specified in the Panel's procedures.
8	FS31	Policies and procedures need to be put in place and implemented in order to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

PART B

INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	11
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	NO
Date of Inspection	23/2/04
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	86

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A Statement of Purpose and Children and Young People's Guide to the Service were available. Both documents had recently been updated and arrangements had been made for foster parents and foster children to receive a copy. Both documents were informative and well written. The Manager confirmed that foster children had been consulted regarding the contents and design of the Children's Guide. The Manager also confirmed that Swiis foster Care was considering making the Guide available in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

During the 12 months prior to the inspection the Agency had increased the number of foster carer families from 31 to 48 and the number of children placed increased from 30 to 49. Swiis Foster Care also now provides its own 'in-house' education service and the staff team at the Agency includes four education case workers. There was evidence that the Head of Foster Care:

- Has a relevant social work qualification and appropriate experience of working with children over the past five years, including significant experience of working in children's services at a senior level;
- Exercised effective leadership in the course of her duties;
- Had commenced a course of training leading to a Level 5 NVQ in Management.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A Criminal Records Bureau check was last carried out in respect of the Head of Foster Care in November 2002. It was confirmed that arrangements were in place to renew police checks every three years. The Head of Foster Care's personnel file was held centrally at the head office in London and was not checked during this inspection.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that:

- The Head of Foster Care had a clear understanding of the operation of the Service and was aware not only of its strengths but also the areas for development;
- There were established lines of communication and accountability between management, staff and carers;
- Foster Carer Support Meetings are held each month and staff attend these. It is the policy of the Service that Supervising Link Workers carry out two visits per month to foster carers' homes;
- There was a system of formal staff supervision and regular staff meetings were held;
- The Agency has a written policy regarding the declaration of any possible conflicts of interest by staff and carers and members of the Fostering Panel;
- Financial procedures were in place. Information provided to purchasers of the Service includes details of the charges in the form of an all-inclusive charge and does not include itemised amounts;
- A formal system was not in place to demonstrate that the Manager monitors those elements of the Service set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

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

20

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

2

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

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

It was noted that:

- The Head of Foster Care had a clearly defined job description and did not hold a similar position within any other organisation;
- Staff interviewed had received job descriptions and they demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability;
- The Deputy Head of Foster Care is in charge of the Agency in the Head of Foster Care's absence. It was noted that the Deputy carried a social work caseload – this should be kept under review in light of the growth of the Service.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence that:

- The standard of accommodation in the sample of foster carer homes visited was satisfactory. Each of the foster carers interviewed confirmed that they understood that they might be visited as part of the Commission's inspection process;
- The foster carers handbook includes reference to the Agency's Health and Safety Policy. Health and safety issues, as well as safe caring issues, are covered when foster carers are being assessed and trained;
- During their assessment the prospective foster carer and the assessing social worker complete a Health and Safety checklist. This covers the foster carer's home and vehicles. The completed checklist is available for examination by members of the Agency's Fostering Panel as well placing authority social workers. Consideration should be given to completing this checklist as part of each carer's annual review.

It is an expectation of the Agency that each foster child will be allocated their own bedroom accommodation unless there are agreed reasons for not doing so, for instance, the child may wish to share their room with a sibling.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

It was noted that:

- The Agency has an 'Equal Opportunities Policy' and this is included in the foster carers handbook;
- The policy refers to Swiis Foster Care's commitment to ensuring that children and young people, and their families, are provided with services that promote equality and challenge discrimination;
- The format used to assess prospective foster carers includes a section on valuing diversity. Consideration is given to whether a family is able to parent a child whose cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic needs may be different to their own;
- The Agency's core post approval training for carers includes a two-day course on 'Valuing Diversity';
- Foster carers and staff interviewed confirmed that the specific needs of children, such as their religion, ethnic origin and culture, and how these can be best met, are given consideration when placements are arranged.

There was evidence, in the case tracking of a sample of placements, that foster carers and social workers worked cooperatively to enhance the confidence, self worth and independence of the children and young people. However, it was noted with concern that, where a planned placement of a young person with disabilities had been arranged, five months after the placement had commenced, the placing authority had not provided all the appropriate aids and adaptations. In addition, a moving and handling risk assessment had not been carried out in relation to the care needs of the young person concerned. There was evidence that the Agency had liaised closely with the relevant health professionals and the placing authority, including arranging for an occupational therapist to become involved,.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that:

- The Agency seeks to obtain appropriate information regarding children and young people to allow suitable placements to be made. However, carers interviewed said that, at times, they received very little information prior to a placement. Although this was mainly in relation to emergency/unplanned placements there was an example of a planned placement where the placing authority had not given the Agency significant information concerning the care needs of the young person;
- Staff and foster carers and their families are consulted and provided with relevant information by the Agency throughout the matching process. (The placing authority social worker is responsible for consulting with the child to be placed and their family);
- Where practicable, planned introductions are arranged between the child to be placed and the prospective foster carer;
- Matching considerations had been taken into account and an introductory visit arranged in respect of the placement of one young person to provide respite for foster carers. This area will be considered in more detail during the next inspection;
- Foster placement agreements did not adequately refer to the elements of matching taken into consideration when agreeing the placement and, although the Agency's new Referral Form includes a section on matching considerations, this was not always fully completed. For example, in one instance where it had been identified by the Fostering Panel that careful matching would be required, this section had been left blank;
- The foster placement agreements examined did not always include all of the information specified in Schedule 6 to Regulation 34(3) of the Fostering Services Regulation 2002. A placement agreement had not been completed in respect of one young person.

The Head of the Fostering Service advised that during the past 12 months the Agency has had significant success in recruiting carers from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Another recruitment target is to increase the number of carers who can provide places for older young people who present with challenging or high-risk behaviours. In order to meet the latter target, consideration is also being given to providing existing foster carers with additional training and funding.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

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

There was evidence that:

- Preparatory training for prospective foster carers includes Child Sexual Abuse, Safe Caring, Managing Difficult Behaviour and Identity and Self Esteem;
- Each foster carer is provided with a copy of 'Safe Caring' published by Fostering Network;
- Foster carers are required to prepare, in consultation with the assessing social worker, a safe caring policy for their home – this is made available to placing authority social workers;
- It is the policy of the Agency that supervising link workers must review each foster carers safe caring policy at least once every three months, as part of the carer's regular supervision.
- Post approval training includes a one-day course on Child Protection which has to be undertaken in the first year following approval;
- The Agency's referral format requires that a risk assessment, based on the needs of the child, be carried out in order to ensure that mechanisms are put in place to provide a safe caring environment;
- The Foster Carer Agreement clearly sets out the Agency's expectation that foster carers are required to comply with the Service's policies on corporal punishment, managing behaviour, unauthorised absences and allegations of abuse and complaints;
- The foster carers handbook contains a section on bullying including recognising and addressing instances of bullying and includes a procedure for carers if a foster child is missing from home;
- The Service's policy on the use of restraint, and the training provided to carers, has been reviewed in light of the recent guidance issued by the Department of Health;
- The Head of Foster Care monitors all allegations of abuse or neglect.

Discussion with two groups of foster carers indicated that some of them felt that they did not get sufficient, or at times accurate, information from the placing authority about the young people being placed with them. This was also reflected in some of the interviews with individual foster carers. However, it was emphasised that the supervising social workers generally gave the foster carers all the information that they had received from the relevant placing authority.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

There was evidence that:

- The Agency has a policy entitled 'Promotion of Family Contact'. This states that the Service is "... committed to the promotion of positive, safe contact between 'Looked After Children' and their birth families";
- The preparatory training for foster carers covers the importance of supporting children in their care to maintain appropriate contacts;
- Contact is also the subject of a one-day post approval course;
- Children were supported to maintain appropriate contacts;
- Contact arrangements are considered when placements are being arranged;
- Foster carers interviewed were clear about the contact arrangements that had been agreed and received appropriate financial support to facilitate contact;
- Supervising link workers review contact arrangements during the supervision sessions with foster carers;
- Foster carers are required to record the outcome of contact arrangements on the Agency's Record Sheets.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

It was noted that:

- The Agency's Children's Guide contains information on how to raise concerns or make a complaint;
- Supervising social workers confirmed that when they visit foster carers they regularly make time to see the foster children;
- Older children are asked to complete a brief structured report for their foster carer's annual review and this asks for their views about the placement;
- SWIIS provides an e-mail address to all the children in a foster carer's household to enable them to contact the Agency in private if there are any issues they want to raise;
- Statutory reviews provide an opportunity for children and their families to be consulted;
- Children also have a more informal opportunity to express their views and opinions to Agency staff when, for example, they attend the activities arranged by the Agency during the summer holidays;
- Post approval training for foster carers includes a two-day course on Communicating with Children.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

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

The following arrangements were in place:

- To ensure children's health care needs are identified at the outset of a placement the Agency's Health Advisor attends placement agreement meetings and, where appropriate, subsequent reviews;
- The Agency's Placement Agreement Meeting Pack includes forms that can be used to obtain consent for appropriate health information to be accessed, as well as consent for the use of non-prescribed medicines;
- The Health Advisor liaises with relevant health care professionals in order to secure relevant services to meet the needs of the foster children and is also available to provide advice and information to foster carers and social work staff;
- A data-base was being prepared that will include basic health information on each foster child to enable monitoring of their health care needs and, for instance, whether they are registered with a GP and dentist;
- Workshops had been held for foster carers covering health and hygiene issues and promoting health. It is intended that these will be incorporated into the preparatory training for prospective foster carers. Foster carers are expected to attend training in first aid during the first year after they have been approved;
- Foster carers maintain records of the health care needs and treatment of the children placed with them;
- The foster carers handbook includes clear written guidance regarding the role of foster carers in promoting the health of children in their care;
- The Agency has arrangements in place with qualified and accredited local workers who are able to provide therapeutic intervention based on the assessed needs of each child/young person. Foster carers can also access this service. The Agency Health Advisor also runs a regular therapy group for adolescents and had also organised a 'Caring for the Carers' day.

Although interviews with foster carers indicated that in general they felt they received adequate information regarding the health care needs of children placed with them, it was evident that there were sometimes significant delays in the Agency obtaining the appropriate 'Looked After Children' documentation from placing authorities – including for instance, details of immunisations received by a child. Also the information in these documents was sometimes not comprehensive enough. There was evidence that the Agency was being more active in trying to address this matter with the relevant placing authorities.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

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

Swiis Foster Care Ltd has recently developed its own Education Service which is managed centrally. The North East Agency employs four education case workers whose role is to provide a range of support to placements in order to meet the educational needs of foster children. At the time of the inspection the education case workers, who are all trained and experienced teachers, were managing the handover of cases from the National Teaching and Advisory Service (NTAS).

There was evidence that staff were reviewing the programmes of support that were already in place. One foster carer interviewed said that this had meant a reduced level of support and, that neither they, nor the young people concerned, had been consulted. Carers at one of the support groups said that the new education service was flexible and targeted those children and young people where there were specific concerns regarding their education. They also said that there was a greater emphasis on working with young people in the school setting where this was needed. The Head of the Fostering Service emphasised that although individual programmes of support were being reviewed the Agency was committed to keeping the Education Service under review to ensure that it met the assessed needs of the children and young people.

It was evident that the foster carers who were interviewed were aware of their responsibilities in respect of contributing to the assessment of each child's educational needs and progress. The carers handbook refers to the Agency's expectations of carers if any child in their care is not in school. Arrangements were in place for an education case worker to meet with new carers as part of their foster carer assessment to ensure that the all new carers have an understanding of the importance attached to this area.

Some of the Placement Agreements that were examined did not include the details specified in Standards 13.4 and 13.8. of the NMS.

Arrangements were being put in place for the Education Service to provide the Agency with information regarding the educational attainment of children and young people, as well as the numbers excluded from school.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

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

The carer's handbook sets out the Agency's expectations of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. In addition, post approval training for foster carers includes a session on 'Leaving Care/Independence'. Further training is planned which will be based on the Fostering Network training pack.

There was evidence that SWIIS staff and foster carers work with the young people and their placing authorities to implement Pathway Plans, when these are in place. It was also evident, in the case of one young person who was aged 16, but where a Pathway Plan had not been prepared, that the supervising social worker and foster carer actively encouraged

the young person to become involved in the planning for their future, and advocated on behalf of this young person.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that:

- The social workers, education case workers, health advisor and placement support worker employed by the Agency were appropriately qualified and experienced;
- Those staff interviewed demonstrated a good understanding of foster care;
- The Agency's procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff were being revised to ensure that they comply with the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations 2002;
- Staff personnel records, in particular records of sessional staff, did not contain all of the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The foster carer assessment format used by the Agency requires written references to be followed up by the assessor. There was evidence that this was being carried out and that relevant police checks and additional checks had been undertaken. Arrangements had been put in place for police checks to be renewed every three years in respect of all people who work in or for the Agency. However, it is recommended that a data base be developed that will enable the effective monitoring and implementation of these arrangements.

Total number of staff of the agency:

14

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

1

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

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

There was evidence that:

- A management structure was in place with clear lines of accountability;
- Staff workloads were monitored and reviewed – arrangements were being made to employ another social worker and a training officer. The Manager confirmed that the level of clerical and administrative support was being reviewed in light of the growth of the Agency;
- Systems were in place for the assessment, approval and review of carers. Assessments are usually carried out by sessional staff and a second assessor is always involved;
- The foster carer reviews are chaired by an experienced, independent fostering and adoption social worker whose reports are presented to the Fostering Panel;
- Staff and carers have the opportunity to undertake on going training and appropriate professional development;
- Staff had access to a range of professional advisors;
- Supervising social workers understood the role of the children's placing authority social workers and worked effectively with them;
- Staff had access to a copy of the Agency's policies and procedures.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

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

There was evidence that, as the Service developed and grew, additional staff were recruited as workloads increased. Supervising link workers support a maximum of ten carers. Sessional staff are also employed by the Agency. It was less clear as to how the workloads of other staff were monitored. There were four education support workers and the Manager confirmed that their workloads would be kept under review to ensure that they provided a satisfactory level of support to placements. Consideration should be given to establishing a clear policy in respect of how the workloads of the education support workers, health advisor, placement support worker and the administrative support staff will be determined, prioritised, monitored and reviewed, particularly in view of the growth of the Service.

It was evident that arrangements were in place to encourage the retention of salaried staff and foster carers, only one fulltime member of staff had left during the previous 12 months. A policy should be put in place regarding how the Agency intends to encourage the retention of Fostering Panel members.

The Agency aims to recruit a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service. The Manager advised that, during the past year, the Agency has had particular success in recruiting carers from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Another priority is to recruit carers who are able to offer placements for older young people presenting high risk or challenging behaviour.

Procedures were in place regarding the assessment of carers. In order to assess the qualities, competencies and aptitudes of prospective foster carers, the Agency makes use of the BAAF Assessment pro forma, which focuses on the areas specified in Standard 17.7.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

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

In respect of the Agency's employment practices it was noted that:

- Staff in substantive posts had an employment contract, a statement of terms and conditions and a job description as well as copies of the Agency's disciplinary and grievance policies. A contract had also been prepared for use with self employed staff used by the Agency;
- Foster carers are required to complete a Foster Carer Agreement and are provided with copies of the Agency's Complaints and Representations Procedures;
- The Agency provides an out of hours 'on call' service. Foster carers valued this service and said that their own link workers were also usually contactable outside office hours;
- Systems were in place for the regular supervision and support of carers. It is the Agency's policy that monthly supervision sessions should take place and that an additional support visit be carried out each month;
- A Malpractice and Whistleblowing Policy for the Service had been prepared and issued to staff and carers;
- The Manager advised that a draft Health and Safety Policy for carers, children and staff had been prepared and, once finalised, will be issued to staff and carers.

Public and employers liability insurance cover was in place as well as professional indemnity insurance. The Manager advised that Swiis Foster Care Ltd was undertaking a review of all insurance cover. This should include the provision of professional indemnity cover for panel members.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

It was noted that:

- The induction of new staff into the Service continued to be relatively informal;
- Staff supervision sessions are used to identify individual training needs;
- One of the purposes of foster carers' annual reviews is to identify the training and developmental needs of the carer and their household. A sample of annual review reports indicated that training needs were being considered. However, the reports would benefit from being more specific in identifying not only the training needed but the timescales within which the training should be provided;
- The training provided to foster carers is regularly monitored and reviewed. The training programme for 2004 identifies the core training that carers should attend;
- Carers and staff jointly participate in some training events;
- Monthly team meetings are used to keep staff informed regarding changes in relevant legislation and guidance.

The Manager advised that a plan for the training and development of all staff involved in fostering work to cover induction, post qualifying and in-service training was being prepared.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5) All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
There was evidence that: • Staff had received a copy of the job description for their post and copies of the policies and procedures for the Service were available in the office; • Staff received formal supervision that is planned in advance – although there were differences in how frequently and regularly this took place. Records indicated that one member of staff had not had any formal supervision for 9 months; • Records are maintained of the content of supervision sessions held; • Arrangements for the supervision of sessional staff had recently been put in place; • Monthly team meetings are held and more informal group supervision takes place on a regular basis; • A system of annual appraisals had not been implemented.		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6) The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
There was evidence that: • The Agency has a clear strategy in place for working with and supporting carers; • Supervising social workers and carers were clear about the role of the supervising social worker; • Annual reviews of carers were being carried out, although delays were noted in relation to the reports being presented to the Fostering Panel; • Foster carers at both support group meetings attended by an inspector praised the support they receive from their link workers and the Agency.		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10) The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
The Foster Care Agreement used by the Agency was clearly written and contained the information required under Schedule 5 of the Fostering Regulations 2002. The Agreement includes a commitment by the Agency to provide each carer with supervision and support from a link worker who will visit carers at least twice a month. One of these visits will be formally recorded as a supervision session. There was evidence that foster carers: • Received satisfactory support from their link workers and other professional staff within the Agency; • Were generally provided with sufficient information at the outset of a placement to enable them to make the placement safe and meet each child's needs – although some said that the information provided by the placing authority at the outset of a placement, was often limited and sometimes inaccurate; • Were provided with a copy of the Agency's foster carer handbook. The handbook includes sections on 'Complaints/Representations' and 'Allegations Against Carers' and the latter includes reference to the provision of independent support to the foster carer;		

- Received regular visits from their supervising social workers - records of these meetings were in place in each of the sample of foster carers' files examined. However, the records indicated that unannounced visits by supervising social workers were not being carried out at least once a year.

There was a system of practical support for carers that covered the areas specified in Standard 22.7. Those individual carers who were interviewed spoke very highly of the support they received from the Agency and this was also reflected in the feedback received at the Carers Support Group meetings.

Records of complaints and allegations were in place although some of the entries in the complaints record contained very limited information regarding the complaint, how it was handled and dealt with and the outcome.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

It was noted that:

- Prospective foster carers are required to attend four days of initial training as part of their assessment.
- The trainers evaluate each carer's contribution to the training and the participants are also asked to evaluate the training they receive. The trainer's evaluation is included in the assessment report for prospective foster carers. Some of the evaluations sampled would benefit from being more detailed;
- Carer's partners are expected to attend the session concerned with child sexual abuse and safe caring. It is an expectation of the Agency that link workers address the issues of safe caring with all members of a carer's family;
- The initial training also includes a session on 'Children Who Foster' and the children of prospective carers are now expected to attend this session;
- The Foster Carer Agreement states that carers are also required to attend further training in order to develop their skills and competencies. It was noted that some carers had attended very little post approval training although this had been addressed at their annual review;
- Foster carers spoke very positively about the training that is provided by the Agency. The Placement Support Worker and link workers provide a childminding service to enable carers to attend. However, it was evident that where training was held at, for instance, a venue in Newcastle this meant carers in the south of the region found it difficult to attend, particularly when children had to be collected from school. The Manager advised that this matter was being addressed;
- Foster Carers are encouraged to enrol on training leading to the award of the NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence that:

- A written policy was in place regarding the maintenance of records in respect of children, foster carers and staff. The policy includes reference to the arrangements in place to return all relevant records to the placing authority when a child leaves a placement and there was evidence that this was followed in practice;
- Case records were in place for each child and these were stored securely. A standard format was in use and this was consistently applied in all the children's files examined;
- Although the necessary Looked After Children (LAC) documentation was not in place in all of the files examined, there was recorded evidence that action had been taken to address this matter. However, given the significant delays noted in some instances, the Agency should be more active in its attempts to acquire the relevant documentation;
- Carers initial training includes a session on 'Identity and Self Esteem' and there is also training on recording, including the need to maintain a record of significant events for a child;
- Carers are encouraged, where appropriate, to keep 'memory boxes' for each child;
- The Agency provides lockable boxes for carers to store information regarding the children in their care.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that:

- Separate records were maintained in respect of staff, carers and children;
- Central records were being maintained of complaints and allegations and children's and carer's files had separate sections to record any complaints;
- Confidential records were securely stored and arrangements were also in place to ensure that information held on computers was also secure;
- Those records examined were maintained in a suitable form that would facilitate the passing on of information;
- Children and Foster Carer Registers were in place, although the latter did not include the dates of reviews of approval. This information was however, held electronically;
- There was no evidence of a system being in place for monitoring the quality and adequacy of records;

- A policy regarding access to confidential records should be prepared and implemented;
- A record was not in place in respect of each person working for the Agency that includes the details specified in Schedule 2 (2) of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002;
- Staff personnel records did not include all the information specified in Schedule 1 of these Regulations.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			49
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			17
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			1
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	360	Maximum £	420

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd. shares its main office accommodation with SWIIS Recruitment Ltd in Newcastle upon Tyne. A sub office in Shildon provides a local and accessible base for staff and carers in the southern part of the region covered by the Agency. The premises used by the Service are easily identifiable as office premises and both offices can be accessed by a shaft lift. The main office accommodation has been re-arranged to cater for a larger staff team. However, neither the main office, nor the sub-office, left much room for expansion. Larger premises were being looked for to replace the office in Shildon. Carer support meetings are now held at separate venues in the north and south of the area covered by the Agency. Foster Panel meetings are also now held at a separate venue.

Security measures were in place in respect of the safe storage of confidential information and the information retained on the computer system. Lockable and secure storage facilities were available for confidential information kept by the service. The Service appeared to be suitably equipped with office equipment and IT systems.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was being assessed by the relevant Area Office of the National Care Standards Commission, as part of the registration of the Responsible Individual for the Organisation.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Staff at the head office of the SWIIS International Group of Companies are responsible for the overall control and supervision of the Agency's financial affairs and powers. All tax, National Insurance and VAT issues are addressed at the head office. The standards relating to this will be assessed as part of the registration of the Responsible Individual for the Organisation. Procedures were in place concerning the financial responsibilities of staff at the Agency. There was evidence available that the Organisation's accounts are maintained and audited by a registered accountant.

Information sent to placing authorities includes information about the charges for the Agency's services. The Head of Foster Care advised that the charging structure was being re-written to provide more transparency for purchasing authorities about the levels of service and additional services provided.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

A written policy on fostering allowances was in place. Rates of payment are reviewed annually and carers are provided with information about the new rates each April. Carers interviewed confirmed that payments are prompt.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The following points were noted:

- The Agency procedures regarding the functions of the Fostering Panel had been revised to comply with the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations;
- The composition of the panel complied with Regulation 24. However, in light of the Deputy Head of the Fostering Service's role in supervising the social workers who complete the foster carer assessments, his role as a panel member should be reviewed;
- Each panel member had been subject to relevant police and authority checks;
- The Fostering Panel has access to a Medical and a Legal Advisor and one of the independent members of the Panel had expertise in education;
- The Managing Director is the Agency Decision Maker;
- The attendance of the Responsible Individual at the Panel was infrequent;
- The Fostering Panel's terms of reference include the review and feedback of issues arising from the presentation and discussion of assessment reports;
- The reports of foster carers annual reviews are also presented to the Panel. It was noted that there were sometimes delays in these reports being received by the Panel following the reviews. This meant that some ex-gratia payments to carers might also be delayed. It was also noted that there had been delays in the recommendations made by the Panel regarding the approval and re-approval of carers being ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

It was evident that the Fostering Panel has a clear quality assurance function. Meetings of the regional panel chairs and heads of service have commenced. However, it was noted that the Panel did not receive all the relevant information regarding the placement needs of children to carry out its monitoring role as specified in the Panel's procedures. The Head of the Fostering Service agreed to address this matter. The Inspectors observed a meeting of the Fostering Panel and the Chair of the Panel was interviewed. There was evidence that the Panel addresses its quality assurance function in relation to the assessment of foster carers and the annual review of carers.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
The Agency provides short break and respite placements. However, at the time of the inspection, there were no placements providing respite for birth families. Policies and procedures need to be put in place and implemented to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.	2

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
This standard was not applicable.	

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

PART D

PROVIDER'S RESPONSE

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 23 February 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report.

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 26 July 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I Mr G S Dadral of SWIIS Foster Care Limited confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name	_____
Signature	_____
Designation	_____
Date	_____

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