



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd

Third Floor

33-39 Grey Street

Newcastle Upon Tyne

NE1 6EE

24th February 2003

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)

NO

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

0191 261 5830

Email Address

sarah.rack@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

N/A

Date and Time of Inspection Visit		24 th February 2003 at 9am	ID Code
Name of Inspector	1	Dennis Bradley	074426
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)			
Name of Interpreter/Signer (if applicable)			

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(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 2001 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 2001 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 2001. 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 30 children/young people.

The Agency works in partnership with the National Teaching and Advisory Service to provide educational support services to children and their carers. In addition to social work and administrative staff, the Service also employs a specialist Health Advisor and a Foster Carer Support Worker.

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.)

Statement of Purpose

This Standard was almost met

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

Fitness to Carry on or Manage a Fostering Service.

1 of these 2 standards was met and the other was almost met.

It was evident that the Head of Foster Care had appropriate skills and experience and arrangements were in place for her to commence training leading to the award of the NVQ Level 5 in Management.

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. A manager duty system provides cover in the Head of Foster Care's absence. It was confirmed that arrangements were being made to introduce a formal system to monitor those elements of the Service set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

7 of these 9 standards were met and the other two were 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. There was evidence that young people were consulted about their care plans and that arrangements were in place to enable young people to voice their opinions about their experience of being in care. The Agency works in partnership with the National Teaching and Advisory Service to support children and young people to meet their educational needs, this can include the provision of one to one support. The Agency needs to prepare written guidance for carers stipulating what its expectations are in terms of carers preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living.

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

6 of these 9 standards were met.

The Agency's recruitment and selection procedures need to be reviewed. 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.

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. The Children's Register and Register of Foster Carers need to be developed to include all the required information. Separate records must be maintained of any complaints or allegations.

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. Consideration was being given to changing the location of Fostering Panel meetings.

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

Standard 27 will be 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.

Fostering Panels**This standard was met.**

The Agency's Fostering Panel was observed to work thoroughly and effectively.

Short Term Breaks**This standard was not applicable.****Family and Friends as Carers****This standard was not applicable.**

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

NO

NO

NO

[illegible]

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection fully actioned?

N/A

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 2001.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
			As this is the first inspection of the fostering service there are no requirements outstanding from previous inspections.	

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		

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 2001, 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	3	FS1	Develop the Statement of Purpose for the Service to include: • Details that are specific to the Service in the North East, based at Newcastle upon Tyne; • The actual numbers of complaints received by the Service and their outcomes; • More details regarding the Principals and Standards of the Service and its aims and objectives. The Statement of Purpose should be made available to all stakeholders. Amend the Children's Guide to include: • The address of the Commission; • Details of how children can secure access to an independent advocate.	An action plan must be prepared setting out how and when requirements 1-7 will be addressed.
2	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.	
3	34	FS8	Ensure that placement agreements contain all the information specified in Schedule 6 to Regulation 34(3) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	
4	16	FS14	Prepare clear written requirements concerning what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent and semi-	

			independent living.	
5	28	FS22	Amend the Foster Carer Agreement to include: • The procedure available to carers for making representations; • Details of the Agency's procedures regarding the placement of children and young people.	
6	12 & 18	FS25	Maintain separate records that bring together data on allegations and complaints. Ensure that a system is in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of records.	
7	22 & 31	FS25	Amend the Children's Register and Register of Foster Carers to ensure that they contain all the details specified in Regulation 22 (Schedule 2) and Regulation 31 respectively, 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.	

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	FS1	The Children's Guide should be made available in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children, for example younger children and children with sensory disabilities.
2	FS2	Put in place arrangements to ensure that the Head of Foster Care obtains a qualification at NVQ Level 4 in Management, or an equivalent qualification, by 2005.
3	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.
4	FS9	The training opportunities made available to foster carers should include training on recognising, recording and addressing instances of Bullying.
5	FS14	Ensure that foster carers receive training to enable them to provide effective support and guidance to young persons preparing to move into independent or semi-independent living.
6	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.
7	FS17FS18	A policy relating to the recruitment of foster carers should be developed.
8	FS18	Prepare a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff that covers all legal requirements. Ensure that the Agency's Whistleblowing Policy is made known to all staff and carers. Ensure that all sessional staff employed by the Agency are provided with a statement of terms and conditions. Obtain professional indemnity insurance for all staff and carers and ensure that the insurance policy covers the costs arising as a result of any child abuse claims against staff or carers.

9	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.
10	FS23	Amend the Foster Carer Agreement to: • clearly identify the courses that all foster carers are required to attend within a certain time following their approval; • refer to the Agency's expectation that, where two adults in one household are approved as carers, both must successfully complete all training.
11	FS25	Prepare and implement a written policy and procedures in respect of access to confidential information and ensure that foster carers, fostered children and their parents know the nature of the records maintained and how to access them.
12	FS9	Review the Service's policy on the use of restraint as well as the training provided to carers in light of the current guidance on the use of physical intervention issued by the Department of Health. It is recommended that a central record of all incidents involving the use of restraint be maintained to facilitate the monitoring and review of such incidents.
13	FS13	Ensure that: • Foster Placement Agreements include, where appropriate, the details specified in Standards 13.4 and 13.8. of the NMS; • The Foster Carer Handbook clearly specifies the expectation of the Agency regarding the arrangements that will be put in place by foster carers if any child in their care is not in school.
14	FS30	Revise the Fostering Panel Policy and Procedures to ensure that they comply with the NMS and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent	14
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	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	24/02/03
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	105

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.

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?

2

A Statement of Purpose was available and this was informative, easy to understand and well written. However, the Statement needs to be further developed to include:

- Details that are specific to the Service in the North East, based at Newcastle upon Tyne;
- The actual numbers of complaints received by the Service and their outcomes;
- The section on Principals and Standards should be developed and the aims and objectives of the service should be defined.

The Statement of Purpose should be made available to all stakeholders.

A Children's Guide was available in the form of a leaflet. Although this was informative it needs to be amended to include:

- The address of the Commission;
- Details of how children can secure access to an independent advocate;

It is also recommended that the Children's Guide should be made available in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children, for example younger children and children with sensory disabilities.

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?

2

The Head of Foster Care has a relevant social work qualification and she advised that arrangements were being made for her to commence a course of training leading to a NVQ Level 5 qualification in Management. There was evidence available confirming that the Head of Foster Care:

- had appropriate experience of working with children over the past five years and significant experience of working in children's services at a senior level;
- exercised effective leadership in the course of her duties.

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

It was evident that there were established lines of communication and accountability between management, staff and carers. Foster Carer Support Meetings are held each month at the Newcastle and Shildon offices and the Head of Foster Care and staff attend these. There was evidence that a system of regular formal staff supervision was in place and there were regular staff meetings. It is the policy of the Service that Supervising Link Workers carry out two visits per month to foster carers' homes.

The Head of Foster Care confirmed that information about the Fostering Service is provided to purchasers and that this includes details of the charges for its services. However, this is in the form of an all-inclusive charge and does not include itemised amounts for each service provided by the Agency. Financial procedures were in place.

It was evident throughout the inspection process 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. However, at the time of the inspection, no formal system was in place to demonstrate that the Manager monitors those elements of the Service set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The Head of Foster Care advised that this matter was being addressed.

The Service has a written policy regarding the declaration of any possible conflicts of interest and arrangements were in place to have this issued to staff and carers and members of the Fostering Panel.

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

2

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.

0

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.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

1

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**

The Head of Foster Care had a clearly defined job description and did not hold a similar position within any other organisation. Fostering staff interviewed confirmed that they had received job descriptions and they demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability.

The post of Deputy to the Head of Foster Care was vacant. However, arrangements were in place for the Heads of Foster Care in the two other regional offices of SWIIS Foster Care Ltd. to provide management support, by means of an 'on call' duty system, in the Head of Foster Care's absence.

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

The standard of accommodation in the sample of foster carer homes visited was satisfactory. The Head of Foster Care advised plans were in place for the supervising link worker to inspect each foster carer's accommodation as part of their annual review and that this will include a health and safety check.

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.

The Policy and Procedures document (Handbook) provided to each foster carer includes reference to the Agency's Health and Safety Policy. This states that particular attention will be paid to Health and Safety issues and Safe Caring issues in the home 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 carers vehicle, including whether it is taxed and insured and has a valid MOT. The completed checklist is appended to the assessment document (Form F) and is available for examination by members of the Agency's Fostering Panel as well placing authority social workers. The Head of Foster Care advised that the Health and Safety Policy was being developed to provide more specific guidance on the health and safety responsibilities of foster carers.

Each of the foster carers interviewed confirmed that they understood that they might be visited as part of the Commission's inspection process.

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

The Agency has an 'Equal Opportunities Policy' a copy of which is given to all carers. This policy includes a clear statement regarding the Service's commitment to ensuring that children and young people, and their families, are provided with services that promote equality and challenge discrimination. The Agency's Foster Carer Agreement includes an expectation that:

"SWIIS Foster Care carers are expected to appreciate each individual child's/young person's needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, disability and sexuality and provide an environment which values diversity and promotes equal opportunities."

The assessment format utilised by the Agency to assess prospective foster carers also

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 policy makes it clear that if prospective carers have oppressive attitudes it will be a contra-indication to appointment. Foster carers and Fostering Service staff interviewed confirmed that, where possible, matching considerations include deliberations concerning the way in which such specific needs as mentioned above can be met, as well as an assessment of a carer's ability to meet such needs.

The Agency's core post approval training for carers includes a two-day course on 'Valuing Diversity'. The Handbook provided to foster carers should be developed to include specific reference to their role in encouraging foster children to access opportunities to develop and pursue their interests and hobbies. There was evidence, in the case tracking of a sample of placements, that foster carers and social workers worked cooperatively to enhance the confidence and self worth of the children and young people.

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

Those staff and foster carers who were interviewed confirmed that staff, prospective foster carers and their families are consulted and provided with relevant information throughout the matching process. The placing authority social worker is responsible for consulting with the child to be placed and their family. Matching considerations also form an integral part of the Agency's assessment of prospective foster carers. In order to build on this, consideration should be given to referring to the matching process in the Agency's Child Placement Referral Procedure and in the Referral Record. The latter could be developed to include specific reference to the areas specified in Standard 8.5 of the NMS.

The Service was seeking to recruit more carers from ethnically diverse backgrounds as well as carers who could provide places for older young people who present with challenging or high risk behaviours.

Examination of a sample of placement agreements showed that they did not adequately refer to the elements of matching taken into consideration when agreeing the placement. In addition, the placement agreements did not always include all of the information specified in Schedule 6 to Regulation 34(3) of the Fostering Services Regulation 2002. There was evidence, in respect of one transracial placement, that additional support had been provided to the foster family by an ethnic minority support worker employed by the placing authority

There was evidence available confirming that, where practicable, planned introductions were arranged between the child to be placed and the prospective foster carer.

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**

The training programme that prospective foster carers are required to attend as part of their assessment and preparation includes: Child Sexual Abuse, Safe Caring, Managing Difficult Behaviour and Identity and Self Esteem. Post approval training includes a one-day course on Child Protection which has to be undertaken in the first year following approval. The Head of Foster Care advised that post approval training in Child Protection is offered to carers on at least an annual basis.

Each foster carer is provided with a copy of 'Safe Caring', published by Fostering Network. They are also required to prepare, in consultation with the assessing social worker, a safe caring policy for their home. This policy is available to the placing authority social worker as an appendix to the carer's Form F assessment. 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. It is also the Agency's policy that pre-placement meetings will include the carrying out of a risk assessment, based on the needs of the child, in order to ensure that mechanisms are put in place to provide a safe caring environment.

Foster carer agreements clearly set 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:

- Makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable;
- Contains a section on bullying including recognising and addressing instances of bullying;
- Includes a procedure for carers if a foster child is missing from home.

There was evidence available during the inspection that the Service's policy on the use of restraint, and the training provided to carers, was being reviewed in light of the recent guidance issued by the Department of Health.

There was evidence that the Head of Foster Care monitored all allegations of abuse or neglect. However, it is recommended that a written procedure is prepared and implemented in respect of how information regarding allegations of abuse and neglect will be collated, scrutinized and evaluated.

Discussion with a group of foster carers indicated that some of them felt that they did not get sufficient, or at times accurate, information about the young people being placed with them from the relevant placing authority. 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. In their responses to a questionnaire, 17 the 18 foster carers confirmed that they were adequately informed about the backgrounds of children placed with them. All 18 indicated that the Fostering Service staff were good at letting them know about matters concerning their foster children.

Of the 17 young people who responded to a questionnaire 13 indicated that they were never bullied and 1 indicated they were hardly ever bullied.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%
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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 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. It was also evident, from the sample of placements that was case tracked, that the children concerned were supported to maintain appropriate contacts. The Agency's Placement Referral Form includes a section on contact arrangements and there was evidence that these were considered when placements were being arranged. Foster carers confirmed that they were clear about the arrangements that had been agreed and that, where appropriate, they received financial support to facilitate contact.

There was evidence that 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.

It is recommended that, in order to underpin current practice, clear procedures are prepared that set out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child in foster care are to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.

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

The importance of listening to children in their care is covered in the assessment and preparatory training of foster carers – the trainers evaluate each prospective foster carer's contribution to the training. Post approval training for foster carers includes a two-day course on Communicating with Children.

The Agency's Children's Guide contains information on how to raise concerns or make a complaint. 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. Children also have a more informal opportunity to express their views and opinions to Agency staff when they attend the activities arranged by the Agency during the summer holidays.

Statutory reviews provide an opportunity for children and their families to be consulted. The Agency's draft Quality Assurance Policy includes a proposal to carry out 'exit interviews' of young people when a foster placement ends.

15 of the 17 children and young people who responded to a questionnaire confirmed that their opinions were listened to and 2 indicated that they were sometimes listened to.

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 Agency's newly appointed Health Advisor already had established links with some of the health services in the area and, at the time of the inspection, was creating links with services in the other areas covered by the Agency. There was evidence from interviews with foster carers that they felt they received adequate information regarding the health care needs of children placed with them at the commencement of the placement. However, it was evident that there were delays in the Agency obtaining the appropriate Looked After Children documentation from placing authorities in respect of some children and that, once received, the information in these documents was sometimes not comprehensive enough. There was evidence that this matter was being addressed by the Agency.

In order to ensure that children's health care needs are identified at the outset of a placement it is intended that the Health Advisor will attend all placement meetings and, if there are any health issues, subsequent reviews. The Health Advisor explained that a data-base was being prepared that will include basic health information on each foster child. In addition it is intended that each young person will be assisted to prepare their own record of their health and health care needs. The Health Advisor is available to provide advice and information to foster carers and social work staff to enable them to address the individual health needs of children in placement.

Training was being prepared for foster carers to cover health and hygiene issues and promoting health. First Aid training had also been arranged. It is intended that foster carers will be required to attend this training in the first year after they have been approved.

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.

There was evidence that foster carers maintained records of the health care needs and treatment of the children placed with them. Foster carers interviewed also appeared to be clear regarding their responsibilities in respect of meeting the health care needs of the children. It is recommended that the Agency provides clear written guidance to foster carers regarding their role in promoting the health of any child in their care. This should cover those areas specified in Standard 12.6

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 works in partnership with the National Teaching and Advisory Service (NTAS) to support children to meet their educational needs. NTAS provides trained staff who will, following an assessment, plan and implement programmes aimed at enabling children and young people to access appropriate mainstream educational provision. Such support may include a period of one to one support for a young person. There was evidence in the sample of case records examined that NTAS and SWIIS staff actively supported and monitored the educational placements of young people, in collaboration with the foster carer. NTAS also provides training to foster carers.

Interviews with foster carers indicated that the service provide by NTAS was valued and this was corroborated by those foster carers who were at the support group meeting attended by an inspector. 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. However, it is recommended that this is clearly stipulated in the foster carer handbook. The handbook should also be revised to make clear the Agency's expectations of carers if any child in their care is not in school.

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

The Head of Foster Care advised that arrangements had been made for NTAS to provide the Agency with information regarding the educational attainment of children and young people, and the numbers excluded from school, in their monthly reports.

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?****2**

There were no written requirements in place stipulating what the Agency's expectations are of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. In addition, foster carers were not provided with relevant training although the head of Foster Care advised that such training was being arranged.

A Pathway Plan was in place for one young person. There was evidence that NTAS and SWIIS staff and the foster carers were working with the young person and the Placing Authority's after care worker to implement the plan. It was also evident that the young person concerned was consulted about the plan and involved in the decision making process.

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

The Agency's procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff should be revised to ensure that they comply with the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Staff consulted as part of the inspection confirmed that they had been interviewed prior to being appointed. An examination of a sample of staff personnel records indicated that, particularly in respect of sessional staff, not all of the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 was in place.

On the basis of information submitted with the pre-inspection questionnaire, interviews with staff and an examination of a sample of personnel files, it was evident that the social workers and the Health Advisor employed by the Agency were appropriately qualified and experienced. Those staff interviewed demonstrated a good understanding of foster care.

In respect of foster carers, the assessment format used by the Agency requires written references to be followed up by the assessor. In the sample of records examined there was evidence that this was being carried out. There was also evidence that relevant police checks had been carried out as well as additional checks.

The Head of Foster Care confirmed that 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.

Total number of staff of the agency:

12

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

0

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**

A management structure was in place with clear lines of accountability. The manager of the Service had appropriate skills and experience. On the basis of interviews with social work and administrative staff there was evidence that workloads were monitored and reviewed. Systems were in place for the assessment, approval and review of carers. Assessments are usually now carried out by sessional staff. 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. Appropriate terms and conditions of service should be put in place for sessional staff.

There was evidence that social work staff received regular supervision and that their workloads were monitored. Supervising link workers support a maximum of ten carers. Consideration should be given to establishing a clear policy in respect of how the workloads of the administrative support staff will be determined, prioritised, monitored and reviewed, particularly in view of the growth of the Service.

Staff and carers had the opportunity to undertake on going training and appropriate professional development. The Head of Foster Care advised that support staff and newly appointed social work staff attend carer training for information and their own development. A draft training programme was in place for carers for 2003/04.

There was evidence that access to a range of professional advisors was available for staff. It was evident that the Agency social workers understood the role of the children's placing authority social workers and worked effectively with them. Staff interviewed confirmed that they 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. Sessional staff were also employed by the Agency. It was evident that arrangements were in place to encourage the retention of salaried staff and foster carers.

The Head of Foster Care advised that, in order to provide appropriate matches, the recruitment of more carers, and in particular carers from ethnically diverse backgrounds and carers who are able to offer placements for older young people presenting high risk or challenging behaviour, is a priority of the Service. Procedures were in place in respect of 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?****2**

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;
- 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;
- A draft whistleblowing policy for the Service had been prepared and once finalised will be issued to all staff and carers;
- Health & Safety Policies were in place and a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff was being prepared.
- Public and employers liability insurance cover was in place. However, professional indemnity insurance cover for all staff and carers was not in place and the insurance policy did not cover the costs arising from any child abuse claims against carers or staff. Professional advice, representation and legal costs are met for Carers through their individual membership of Fostering Network. This is purchased by the Agency for all Carers in order to provide access to this service in the event of any allegation of abuse or for any other reason.

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**

The induction of new staff into the Service appeared to be relatively informal. A system of annual staff appraisals had recently been introduced. Staff appraisals and staff supervision sessions are used to identify individual training needs. It is recommended that a clear plan is prepared for the training and development of all staff involved in fostering work to cover induction, post qualifying and in-service training. Suitable records should be maintained of all staff training. The effectiveness of the training programmes should be routinely evaluated and the programmes should be reviewed and updated at least annually.

The foster carer handbook states that one of the purposes of foster carers' annual reviews is to identify the training and developmental needs of the carer and their household. This was evident in the sample of carers files examined. There was evidence that the training provided to carers was monitored and evaluated, although it was acknowledged that the aims and objectives for courses such as Valuing Diversity needed to be identified. A two-tier training programme for carers had been prepared for 2003/4.

Monthly team meetings are used to keep staff informed regarding changes in relevant legislation and guidance. The Head of Foster Care advised that carers and staff do jointly participate in some training events.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Staff interviewed confirmed that they had received a copy of the job description for their post. Copies of the policies and procedures for the Service were available in the office.

Staff confirmed that they receive regular formal supervision and that these are planned in advance. There was evidence that records are maintained of the content of the supervision. The arrangements for the supervision of sessional staff will be examined at the next inspection.

Monthly team meetings are held. It was also evident that more informal group supervision takes place on a regular basis. A system of annual appraisals had recently been introduced.

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 had a clear strategy in place for working with and supporting carers and, that this was understood by both staff and carers. The strategy is referred to in the Agency's Foster Carer Agreement. It was also evident that supervising social workers and carers were clear about the role of the supervising social worker. There was evidence, in the sample of carers files examined, that annual reviews of carers were being carried out and that the review reports were presented to the Fostering Panel. Foster carers at both support group meetings attended by an inspector praised the support they receive from their link worker and the Agency.

In their response to a questionnaire 17 of the 18 foster carers concerned indicated that they were very satisfied with the support they received from the Agency and 1 said that they were supported quite well.

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 all of the information required under Schedule 5 of the Fostering Regulations 2002, with the following exception: the procedure available to foster carers for making representations. The agreement should also be developed to include details of the Agency's procedures regarding the placement of children.

The Foster Care 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. Foster carers interviewed confirmed that they received satisfactory support from their link workers and other professional staff within the agency. They also confirmed that they 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. However, some carers said that the information provided by the placing authority was sometimes inaccurate.

Each foster carer receives a copy of the Agency's Foster Carer Policy and Procedure

document. There was evidence that supervising social workers met regularly with foster carers and records of these meetings were in place in each of the sample of foster carers files examined. However, in respect of one foster carer visits did not appear to be carried out twice a month or supervision sessions once a month. Arrangements had been put in place to carry out unannounced visits at least once a year and this was referred to in the Foster Carer Agreement.

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.

The carers 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. Records of complaints and allegations were in place. It is recommended that a policy should be prepared indicating the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the Agency's foster carer register.

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

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. 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. Link workers are also expected to provide support to all members of a foster carer's household. The initial training also includes a session on 'Children Who Foster'.

The Foster Carer Agreement states that carers are also required to attend further training in order to develop their skills and competencies. Consideration should be given to developing the Agreement to:

- clearly identify the courses that all foster carers are required to attend within a certain time following their approval;
- refer to the Agency's expectation that, where two adults in one household are approved as carers, both must successfully complete all training.

Foster carers spoke very positively about the training that is provided by the Agency.

The Agency has an Equal Opportunities Policy and this is included in the handbook provided to carers. It is recommended that this policy is developed to indicate how all training will be provided within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice, and how training will be organised to encourage and facilitate attendance by foster carers. Foster carers interviewed confirmed that they are encouraged to attend training and it is an expectation of the Agency that link workers facilitate attendance. The programme of ongoing training for carers includes core workshops covering six areas at Level 1 and three at Level 2 that all carers are expected to complete. There was evidence that the annual reviews of foster carers includes consideration of their training and developmental needs.

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

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. 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 there was recorded evidence that action had been taken to address this matter. Those foster carers interviewed confirmed that they understood the basis of the placement of each child placed with them. There was evidence that suitable arrangements were in place for the transference of relevant information regarding a child to the responsible authority as and when required.

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. The Head of Foster Care advised that carers are encouraged, where appropriate, to keep 'memory boxes' for each child. The Agency makes clear its expectation that carers keep information on children placed with them confidential and secure. Foster Carers are provided with lockable boxes 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

Separate records were in place in respect of staff, carers and children. However, central records were not being maintained of complaints and allegations. Each child's and carer's file had separate sections to record any complaints.

A system was not in place for monitoring the quality and adequacy of records. There was evidence that confidential records were securely stored in lockable cupboards in a room which was lockable. Arrangements were also in place to ensure that information held on computers was also secure. A policy regarding access to confidential records should be prepared and implemented.

Those records examined appeared to be maintained in a suitable form that would facilitate the passing on of information. On the basis of the sample of records examined there was evidence that private and secure records were in place for each child and carer.

The Children's Register and Register of Foster Carers needs to be developed to fully comply with the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. A record must also be maintained of each person working for the Agency that includes the details specified in Schedule 2 (2) of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			30
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			0
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			0
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			0
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			0
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. currently 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. There appeared to be sufficient space available in both offices although neither left much room for expansion. The main office had a large meeting room that was used for carer support meetings and Foster Panel meetings. However, the room was not totally enclosed and this meant that people in the reception area might overhear such meetings. The Head of Foster Care advised that a different venue for panel meetings was being considered. A bookable meeting room was available for use on the premises of the sub-office. 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. However, the room containing these lockable cupboards was not lockable at the time of the inspection. 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 will be assessed as part of the registration of the responsible individual for the organisation, within the relevant Area Office of the National Care Standards Commission.

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.

The Head of Foster Care confirmed that the information sent to placing authorities included information about the charges for the Agency's services. However, specific information about charges and the Agency's charging policy was being prepared. This should include the information specified in Standard 28.7.

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
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The Agency has clear written procedures regarding the functions of the Fostering Panel. These should be revised to ensure that they comply with the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations.

It was noted that the actual composition of the panel complied with Regulation 24 although the policy did not. The policy regarding panel membership refers to each panel member being subject to relevant police and authority checks. It is recommended that this be amended to refer to panel members not being allowed to commence work until all checks have been satisfactorily completed. The Head of Foster Care confirmed that a satisfactory CRB check had been carried out in respect of the current panel members. The Panel Procedures cover decision making when all members of the panel are not in agreement.

The Fostering Panel has access to a Medical Advisor. This person is sent copies of medical reports completed as part of the assessment of prospective carers and also provides advice concerning any medical issues in respect of carers and children.

The Fostering Panel's terms of reference include the review and feedback of issues arising from the presentation and discussion of assessment reports. The Chair of the Panel confirmed that the Panel has a clear quality assurance function. The reports of foster carers reviews are presented to the Panel.

One of the independent members of the Panel had expertise in education.

The Inspector observed a meeting of the Fostering Panel and interviewed the Chair of the Panel. There was evidence that the Panel addresses its quality assurance function and engages in a thorough consideration of the various assessments presented to it. Panel members appeared to be well prepared and a structured decision making process was evident.

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?
Not applicable.	9

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?
Not applicable.	9

PART C**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY****(where applicable)****Lay Assessor**

Signature

Date

Lead InspectorDennis Bradley**Signature**

Date30/10/03

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 24th February 2003 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

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

NO

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 24th October 2003, 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

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

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 Dev Dadral of Swiis Foster Care Ltd 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 _____