



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Fostering Services (WCC)

**Family Placement Service
1st Floor, 4 Frampton Street
London
NW8 8LF**

Lead Inspector
Wynne Price-Rees

Announced Inspection
23rd January 2006 10:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Fostering Services (WCC)

Address Family Placement Service
1st Floor, 4 Frampton Street
London
NW8 8LF

Telephone number 020 7641 8055

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) City Of Westminster

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mr Mark Pomell

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 28th February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Westminster City Council's Fostering Service provides full-time, short term and respite placements for approximately one hundred and ninety-eight children and young people. Responsibility for fostering provision is shared across the Fostering Service, Adoption Service and Westminster Accommodation and Leaving Care Team whom all report to the Head of Commissioning for Looked After Children. Each service has a designated manager. The Fostering Service operates two teams of social workers, each with its own Assistant Team Manager as well as the Team Manager. One team deals with the recruitment and approval of foster carers; the second team supports foster carers after approval by the City Council's Fostering Panel. Placements are made with foster carers approved by the City Council, through Independent Fostering Agencies and, in some cases, with relatives. All placements are approved by the Council to ensure children and young people placed are safe and well cared for. The responsible teams are now based in the same building and share information regarding the children receiving a service with the designated children's social workers located in the LAC team. The offices provide secure accommodation for confidential information. The foster placements provided are located within London and elsewhere in the country.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place over seven days with the Inspector based within the teams' building and visiting placements to carry out interviews and assess the appropriateness of the accommodation provided. Fourteen foster carer and eight children's questionnaires were returned and are also incorporated within the report findings. A panel meeting was attended and the panel chair interviewed.

What the service does well:

The fostering service continues to provide a good service with carers feeling supported and receiving training focused on areas required to provide appropriate placements that enable the children to develop and progress. Support is provided by a dedicated, experienced and professional staff team. The New Families Team have introduced informal meetings over coffee outside the normal environs of the service and this has helped develop carer peer support.

The service continues to be proactive in identifying areas in which there is a demand for fostering and supplying foster carers who are equipped to meet that need. This is not an easy task, as the demand areas tend to increase or decrease frequently depending on events outside the control of the unit. A demand has been identified for foster carers to provide a service for teenagers and the service is attempting to recruit to meet this demand. As the recruitment procedure by necessity is quite drawn out, to ensure protection of children and adequacy of prospective foster carers, it can mean that the area of demand has changed by the time the foster carers for that area have been recruited and trained. To this end the service are focusing on providing a team of locally recruited foster carers that can be more flexible and meet demand as it arises.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The fostering teams have now relocated to the same building and are on the same floor as the LAC teams and this has improved communication between them that has led to more joined up working.

What they could do better:

The initial prospective carer assessments require to be revisited so that the service resources and those of prospective carers, who are not or don't feel suited to fostering, are not wasted within the process. Some carers spoken with raised concerns regarding the siting of training sessions and meetings now that the team have moved to the north of the borough particularly as there are a large number based south of the river. The Service Manager said that a number of training sessions have taken place at City hall to accommodate the carers.

The main area of concern did not relate directly to the fostering service, rather it was the lack of information given to carers prior to a placement commencing. In particular this referred to emergency placements where in some instances no written information was forwarded prior to placement commencing. This information is provided by placing social workers rather than the fostering team. It caused concern as foster carers found it difficult to make a child feel comfortable from first point of contact if no information was available. Simple things such as food likes and dislikes would have made the child's transition into a new setting with new people easier for them and the foster carers. They said this did not happen in all instances but they have occasionally encountered problems. The Inspector was told that Westminster City Council procedure would in future be that no child will be placed unless placement information is provided prior to commencement.

Difficulties also arose regarding children being accommodated by foster carers outside the age range they had agreed to within the foster carer contracts. In some instances they said they were made to feel there was no real option other than placing with them.

There were also some reservations about the amount and content of the visits made by LAC social workers regarding visits to children with the quality of the service provided varying hugely depending on the individual social worker and also the large turnover in social workers that reduced continuity for the children.

Other issues related to the length of emergency placements and uncertainty regarding when they may terminate. Opinions regarding the appropriateness of contact after a placement varied with most foster carers feeling this was adequate whilst others thought it could have been better managed with more formal agreements set and adhered to.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12. The development and health of children is promoted by the fostering

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers interviewed and those who returned questionnaires felt that they are well trained and supported by their link workers to promote the health and development of children in their care. The training has made them aware of their obligations regarding registering children with GPs, having health checks carried out and accessing health services within the community. Link workers have been supportive in helping to access the required service and to give advice either during visits or via the duty system. Basic training is provided in areas such as health, hygiene, first aid and health promotion such as communicable diseases. Infant first aid courses including resuscitation have also been made available. Work has been carried out around childrens development and emotional wellbeing with the CAMMS team. A health promotion event is also scheduled for later on in the year. Carers said they are involved in and contribute to the review and planning process regarding the child's health needs.

Concerns were raised about the quality and amount of health information sometimes received prior to a placement being made. Examples were given of a foster carer not being made aware of a child suffering from asthma, prior to placement and another with extremely poor hygiene and no conception of what hygiene meant. This made basic tasks such as bathing difficult to undertake, as the child could not understand why they needed a bath.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 & 30. People carrying on or managing the service are suitable and protect children from abuse and neglect with the foster panel working efficiently and effectively. As appropriate a match as possible is made between children and suitable carers.

EVIDENCE:

There is a thorough robust, written recruitment procedure that meets the criteria and all areas required by standard fifteen. All departments with fostering provision have clearly defined areas of responsibility, including monitoring, quality assurance and the managers have been vetted in accordance with the requirements of Schedule 1 of the regulations, as part of the recruitment procedure. This includes CRB clearance and applies to all staff with direct access to children. Records of checks and references are kept centrally by the Human Resources Department. The foster panel members have also been CRB cleared.

Great efforts are made to recruit and retain suitable foster carers with the department having a £70,000 budget for this purpose. Recruitment is an ongoing problem due to the borough demographics and ever changing areas of increasing and decreasing demand.

The foster placements visited provided safe, healthy and nurturing environments as demonstrated by the premises provided, care practices

observed and promotion and encouragement of health and educational development. This indicated the recruitment procedure works well, although the initial assessment could be tightened so as not to waste the time of prospective foster carers and scarce resources by them deciding to drop out during the procedure or being deemed as unsuitable at initial panel or review meetings.

Some concerns were also raised regarding placements outside the agreed contracted age groups. Although foster carers felt supported to deliver a service by link workers, some also felt under pressure to take on these placements, from placing teams, particularly in an emergency as they were made to feel there was little suitable alternative for the children concerned. The position was made more difficult with little or no information being forwarded prior to placement. Examples were given of phone calls being made to carers giving age, name, gender and no other information or placement notice. A foster carer said a child was placed in September 2005 and the LAC social worker dropped off the LAC part two information the week prior to the inspection.

There are policies and procedures in place for the protection of children from abuse, neglect and foster carers are trained in what constitutes abuse, action to take if encountered and expectations of the service and those providing it. The foster carer recruitment and monitoring teams are qualified social workers that have received abuse and child protection training. They work in tandem with the LAC team, whom have been allocated caseloads regarding individual children and quarterly joint visits to foster carer placements take place with LAC reviews attended as required. The communication between the teams has been greatly improved as they now share a floor in the same building rather than being located in different parts of the borough.

The foster carer link workers carry out annual unannounced visits to foster carer homes, with accompanying report, to assess if the required standards are met. These feed the annual review panels. The children have access to the Young Person's Complaints Officer and advocacy through the Children Rights Service. This is stated in the pocket guide to fostering and children's guide to fostering.

The fostering agreement states that corporal punishment is an unacceptable form of punishment for children and carers confirmed they understood this. There is also a comprehensive policy regarding bullying.

A foster panel was observed and found to work effectively and impartially taking into account all available information before coming to a decision after discussion. They take place within the stated guidelines, act as part of the quality assurance monitoring system and are minuted with agendas made available prior to meeting. All the required policies and procedures are in place.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

7, 13 & 31. Diversity is valued, educational achievement promoted and it is recognised that parents are the main carers during short-term breaks.

EVIDENCE:

Achieving diversity is a core objective of the service and this is reflected in the recruitment policy and foster carers recruited. Wherever possible carers are matched appropriately to children although as previously stated due to fluctuating areas of need perfect matches are not always possible. Equality is promoted within the spectrum of diversity recruitment.

Problematic areas tend to arise around emergency placements, where a suitable match cannot be found. A number of emergency placements made have over run the stipulated six weeks. This is not under the jurisdiction of the fostering teams, who make great efforts to make sure cultural and gender needs are met, wherever possible, within the emergency placements. In the placements visited it was apparent that the foster carers are committed to enhancing children's confidence and promoting their self-esteem and they are well supported by link workers to do so. Examples of the hard work put in were improved school attendance and general appearance and hygiene. Any cultural, religious and dietary needs are met although this tends to be after the placement is made and as a result of dialogue between carers, link workers and the children and experience of them in situation rather than information forwarded prior to the placement. This is also the case with hobbies and interests.

PEPs were in place and had been put together by the EPIC team. There were mixed comments regarding their focus on the educational needs of the children. Some carers felt they reflected the needs whilst others thought they sometimes did not fully reflect learning requirements. One carer said the system of contact with the school gave a far greater insight into the children's needs and this had been facilitated and supported by the link worker. As a result they felt far more confident in fulfilling their role in this aspect of care. Carers confirmed they had received training regarding their roles and responsibilities regarding education and development. Some examples were given of particular educational support requirements being identified within the plans that were not put in place. However they felt this was more an issue regarding the particular educational establishments. On one PEP it stated that a child's area of strength was in writing and drawing. It was interesting to note that the child's contribution area on the form was blank. This suggests a greater need to encourage the child to participate in the placement planning process by utilising their skills and interest areas.

There are policies and procedures regarding short-term breaks that carers understood and implemented with birth parents remaining central to promotion and education needs where possible. They felt well trained and supported by link workers to effectively undertake these placements with suitable information provided prior to placements.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10 & 11. Suitable contact arrangements are made and consultation promoted.

EVIDENCE:

The children are consulted as part of the LAC review process although carers felt the degree of consultation varied depending on the level and type of rapport between the child and social worker. Link workers also attend a significant number of review meetings and carry out quarterly joint review visits.

Carers said that part of core training was the importance of listening to the child and observation of care practices and recorded child development evidenced that this was taking place. As well as consultation during the reviews childrens' views are also sought at the end of a placement. They are also invited to an annual service-user conference, for which they are prepared and have full access to the Children's Rights Service.

Complaints regarding foster carer placements are taken to panel and incorporated in a suitability review. The children also have access to the Westminster City Council complaints procedure that is outlined in the children's guide and this is facilitated by the Children's Rights Officer.

Evaluation forms are sent to foster carers regarding the suitability and use of training courses and there is also a contribution form when a placement ends. Foster carers are also able to contribute to their annual appraisal reviews.

Guidance is available regarding promoting appropriate contact and a promoting contact course was attended, by twenty carers, two weeks prior to the inspection. The carers said they had not generally experienced problems regarding delivering suitable contact with a child's family as outlined in LAC plans, although there had been some instances when parents had unexpectedly been encountered by foster carers and the children when out. The foster service makes transport available, if travel is required, to take a child to an agreed contact. The carers were less than enthusiastic about the cab firm contracted with and cited numerous instances where they had not turned up or did not have suitable equipment regarding transporting young children. Where possible carers are supported to provide contact within their own home if this is deemed safe and appropriate.

The main problem area was regarding their contact with the child after the placement had ended, when agreed type of contact or meetings didn't tend to happen which caused distress. In some instances this arose from the adoptive parents trying to establish a relationship with the child and the fostering carer links possibly hampering this.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

29. An allowance and agreed expenses are paid by the fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

The carers said they do receive allowances and agreed expenses. However sometimes the payments are not prompt, although in some instances carers said this was due to their failure to fill in expense claims. However this was not the case for all. Part of the problem is areas of responsibility for specific payments. One carer said they received prompt payment for the purchase of items for a baby placement such as a buggy and mattress that were submitted through their link worker. Other items such as purchase of clothes that were the responsibility of the child social worker were delayed and not paid in full. Records of payments to foster carers and expenses incurred were recorded in the five eight foster carer files inspected. A complaint was made regarding the non payment of a retainer that has now been rectified and another carer felt that they were in the wrong allowance level due to the amount of expense incurred through level of support provided. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

The service has an adequate number of suitably experienced and qualified staff, who have a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers and access to comprehensive childrens records.

EVIDENCE:

Currently there are no vacancies in the staff teams and one member of staff who is on maternity leave is having their work covered within the team. The caseload limits are not being exceeded whilst this work is covered. The teams were spoken to as a group, individually and were experienced, qualified, knowledgeable and competent. The carers felt well supported and supervised by them to carry out their duties and responsibilities during visits, when operating the duty system and there were enough of them to operate the service efficiently. If particular team members were not available they returned calls as soon as possible. Annual review reports were prepared and available to the fostering panel.

There is a low staff turnover.

A thorough carer assessment system is in operation and great efforts are made to recruit carers to match the needs of children in the borough although this is not an easy task as demand areas regularly change. The assessment system covers all the requirements of standard 17.7.

The children's case records were kept within the LAC teams who are located on the same floor within the building and accessible to the fostering team.

Communication between the teams has been improved now that everyone is in the same building and people are able to liaise better and put faces to names.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	4
6	4
8	3
9	3
15	3
30	3

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

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

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

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS10	The service should review the contract with the cab company.
2	FS6	The assessment procedure should be reviewed.
3	FS8FS9FS12	Carers should be given full information prior to an emergency placement being made and placements made should not be outside the agreed age span.

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