



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

London Borough of Barnet Fostering Service

**Barnet House
1255 High Road
Whetstone
London
N20 OEJ**

Lead Inspector
Mrs Angela Grier

Key Announced Inspection
27th November 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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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	London Borough of Barnet Fostering Service
Address	Barnet House 1255 High Road Whetstone London N20 OEJ
Telephone number	020 8359 2000
Fax number	020 8359 5749
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	London Borough of Barnet
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Debbie Gabriel
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 6th October 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Fostering service for the London Borough of Barnet has been restructured since the last inspection and now consists of three teams, the Recruitment and Training team, the Support and Development team and the Kinship and Permanence team. The Fostering service has also included the Barnet Link service as part of the support and development team.

The Fostering Service aims to provide placements in a family for children who cannot, either temporarily or permanently, be cared for within their own family. The London Borough of Barnet has approximately 106 approved foster carers, with a number of carers in the process of assessment. Due to a shortfall in their own resources to meet demand, the London Borough of Barnet commissions care through external providers, which include Independent Fostering Agencies.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection began on the 27th November 2006 and took place over six working days. Feedback to the assistant divisional manager was given on 19th December 2006.

The inspector attended the panel on 1st December 2006 and interviewed the chair of the panel, a councillor sitting on the panel and a trainee social worker who was observing the panel. The inspector case tracked four foster carers and the children they cared for. Three visits to foster carers were carried out and four children were seen and interviewed. The fourth carer identified by the inspector did not respond to calls made by the inspector and although different telephone numbers were tried it was not possible in the time available to arrange to meet with him or the young person he cared for. One file case tracked by the inspector was as a result of a child protection strategy meeting to ensure that processes agreed in the meeting had been followed.

Since the last inspection in October 2005 the Fostering Service has undergone restructuring. This has resulted in the creation of three new teams headed by team managers who in turn area responsible to the assistant divisional manager. All teams are fully staffed with qualified social workers and trainee social workers.

The inspector interviewed the Independent Reviewing Officer for foster carers who is based in the Listening to Children division. Reviews of foster carers have been carried out and supervising social workers and children's social workers are expected to submit reports to inform the review. The inspector interviewed the consultant responsible for the recruitment of foster carers.

Sixteen questionnaires were received from foster carers, three young people responded to the questionnaires and seven social workers representing a number of children cared for by foster carers also responded. Where possible their comments have been included in this report.

The last report identified ten requirements and nine recommendations. Three of these requirements are repeated in this report and a further five requirements and three recommendations have been identified from this inspection.

It was not possible to assess how the new restructuring of the fostering team is working as the process of restructuring had only recently taken effect. Notwithstanding this the general response from the questionnaires indicates that the service has improved from previous years.

What the service does well:

The fostering service has a full complement of qualified and experienced staff. It has increased the number of in house foster carers, which in turn provides a better chance for a suitable match to be found for each child.

The recent restructuring of the fostering service has not yet been tried and tested and further inspections will be needed in order to comment on the effectiveness of this. The service restructure defines what work each team will undertake and therefore gives foster carers a clear message of where the support will come from.

The appointment of a new chair to the fostering panel has streamlined the panel business and provides an objective quality assurance role to the fostering panel.

The appointment of a reviewing officer dedicated to foster carers will strengthen the review process for foster carers and provides clear guidance for the ongoing support of carers.

The fostering service has involved young people in the compilation of child friendly documents for looked after children and the interviewing and selection of GP's (General Practitioners) that will work directly with looked after children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The financial payments to foster carers has been streamlined and explained to carers who now know in advance what extra payments will be made available to them and when they will be paid.

There has been a concerted effort to improve and evaluate the training with a new post being created to support this work.

The fostering service is embarking on a skills based training and assessment package for all foster carers and there is a working party of carers involved in this process.

The ideas for recruiting new foster carers are innovative and are being properly evaluated to ensure they work. The introduction of a new Kinship and Permanence team is a new and interesting development in the fostering service and the managers and staff are excited about the prospect of working in a different context.

What they could do better:

Two of the three repeated requirements related to policies and procedures, the foster care agreement and the foster carer handbook. These documents are still in draft and have not to date been finalised. The service needs to give

priority to this so as to ensure that carers have an up to date set of policies and procedures to refer to.

There is a recommendation regarding the maintenance of files, which has also been a theme in previous inspections. While file audits by managers have not taken place, the maintenance of a file is also the responsibility of the individual social workers. Reports seen by the inspector were not signed/dated and although many records are kept electronically now all reports/emails/summaries should be easily identifiable.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence from the inspection process and interviews with foster carers. The fostering service reviews and manages the health and welfare of children and young people placed with foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

Basic first aid training is now included as part of the training package for foster carers. The inspector expressed concern regarding the completion of LAC (Looked After Children) forms with medical consent for treatment. One foster carer visited complained that important results regarding the outcome of tests conducted whilst a baby was in hospital was not forwarded to the carers by the Looked After Children Nurse. The registered provider must ensure that within the multi agency approach to carers all information regarding the health and development of a looked after child is given to the foster carer without delay.

There is a health policy for Looked After Children and a smoking cessation group held at the '331 drop in' centre. The inspector was advised that the service is considering forming Sexual education groups. Such groups would need to ensure that there is the appropriate consent from the parent or young person to ensure that any cultural or religious preferences are noted. The statement of purpose clearly states that access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for looked after children in placement offers speedy access to counselling and therapy.

The assistant divisional manager advised the inspector that training in maintaining a healthy lifestyle may be included in the assessment of foster carers for older children. The inspector recommends that foster carer assessments should consider the healthy lifestyle issues of the foster family and also training for carers on helping young people to establish a healthy lifestyle when they leave the care system.

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):

6,8,9,15,30

Quality in these outcome areas is adequate. The judgement has been made using available evidence from the inspection process, interviews with staff and information received from the service throughout the year.

The appointment of a new chair of panel with clear policies and an independent reviewing officer support the fostering service to ensure it maintains a positive approach to protecting children.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service continues to recruit foster carers following the British Association of Adoption and Fostering guidelines. The competences of foster carers form part of the assessment process and are discussed at the foster care panel. The service is using an outside consultant who is working closely with staff to recruit new carers. The inspector interviewed the Campaigns and Communications officer who has been in post since September 2006. He has completed an assessment of the needs of the service and identified gaps in the needs of the service. New methods of recruitment are being implemented and where necessary staff are being re-trained to deal with enquiries. The communication part of this post is to review the foster carer handbook and the children's guides. All these new proposals are constantly being evaluated to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the service.

Placement decisions are made at a weekly placement meeting. The inspector did not attend the meeting, as there has been no change in the procedures

since the last inspection. The inspector recommended that the service consider recording the ethnicity/culture and religion of each foster carer to enable positive matches to be made.

At the last inspection a requirement was made to review the contents of the foster carers handbook. This process is still ongoing and the requirement is therefore repeated in this report. The fostering service must ensure that foster carers are referred to the existing handbook until the new documents are available. The registered provider must ensure that each foster carer has a foster carer handbook that contains all the policies and procedures relating to the service.

The inspector discussed the provision of individual safer caring policy for each foster carer with the assistant divisional manager. It was agreed that there is a need to develop a process to ensure that each carer has their own safe caring policy and that this should be developed as part of the assessment process. This policy should then be reviewed after each placement and at the annual review or if an allegation or complaint is made about the carer or their family. The review pro-forma documents seen by the inspector allude to a safe caring policy but do not specifically include it as part of the supervising social workers report. The registered provider must ensure that each foster carer has an individual safe caring policy before they have a child placed with them.

The inspector saw the job description for the social work assistants who are employed with specific tasks in the recruitment and retention team. This job description was dated October 2004 and did not clearly state that the work of the social work assistants will be supervised by a qualified social worker. The registered provider must ensure that all job descriptions reflect the actual work carried out by the individual and the method of support and supervision provided.

The inspector attended the meeting of the December 2006 foster care panel. The inspector interviewed the chair of the panel, one of the Councillors who is a panel member as part of the corporate parenting group and a trainee social worker from the fostering team who was observing the panel. The Councillor confirmed that training had been provided to panel members and clearly understood the role of the panel in approving carers and providing an overview of the work of the service. The panel was efficient and worked well ensuring that applicants were clear about the process and understood the role of the panel. Form F's were properly scrutinised and the competences of the applicants were discussed before a decision was taken. The chair has prepared a draft report of the work of the panel and circulated it for comments to the panel. The inspector requested that a copy of the final report is sent to the Commission. This will form part of the quality assurance role for future panels. The chair also confirmed that the booklet, which describes the work of the panel and details of the members, is being reprinted.

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

Quality in this outcome is adequate. This judgement is based on interviews with young people and foster carers questionnaires and from information received during the inspection. The inclusion of Barnet Link as part of the fostering team will support children and carers who are offering short term breaks to families. The educational achievement of looked after children is seen as a priority for the fostering service and the service has developed new methods to include carers and young people in education.

EVIDENCE:

Outreach workers have been involved in supporting foster carers where there are issues around meeting the diversity, cultural or ethnic needs of looked after children. Foster carers also commented to the inspector that they use their own formal networks of foster carer support groups to gain extra information to support the children they care for.

Two questionnaires returned as part of the inspection from foster carers stated that the service was slow to find places in education for the children they cared for. The two foster carers seen by the inspector who had children and young people of school age confirmed that support had been provided to help the young people into education. However one file seen by the inspector indicated that when extra tuition support was required for a young person taking GCSE there was a long delay in agreeing the funding for the support. The inspector interviewed the young person and the foster carers and confirmed that although the need for the support had been agreed verbally, no action was taken to obtain the necessary funding. The young person has now taken his exams and is in the lower sixth without having the support in place. The

assistant divisional manager of the fostering service told the inspector that there is a separate looked after children education panel which is a funding group for social workers to access extra help, if the information is on the child's personal education plan. Barnet Council has an Education Champions Scheme linking looked after children to a 'critical friend'. Achievement days and multi agency work is ongoing to promote education. It was not clear to the inspector how this situation had led to a failure to support this young person and the inspector advised the assistant divisional manager of the matter in the feedback session to see what lessons can be learned. The registered provider must ensure that the service supports the educational attainment of all children placed with foster carers.

The Barnet Link scheme which provides respite support to children with disabilities is now located within the fostering service. The inspector did not inspect this standard fully as the team is newly formed and no assessments for carers have been completed and taken to the foster care panel. Earlier inspections have identified issues around this team when it was outside the service and future inspections may monitor the progress of the service.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10,11

Quality in this outcome is good. This judgment is made from information provided as part of the inspection and case tracking three foster carers and the children they care for. The fostering service has access to an in house contact centre and has organised events for looked after children to obtain their views. The fostering service is attempting to reach out to children and young people in different ways to obtain their views on the service they receive.

EVIDENCE:

The three foster carers visited by the inspector confirmed their commitment to contact for the children and young people placed with them. The fostering service has a contact centre that can facilitate contact with families.

The fostering service has contacted young people who are looked after and sought their opinion on the contents and appearance of the children's guide. Young people were also consulted on the appointment of three local GP's who provide a service to Looked After Children.

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer [IRO] last year based in the Listening to Children team ensures that the views of children who are looked after and children in the foster carers' family are consulted. The inspector interviewed the Reviewing Officer and discussed the process for ensuring all the relevant documentation is available to conduct a full review of each carer. The IRO is clear about her responsibility to pursue the outcomes of each review with the supervising social workers or their managers. The inspector recommends that the fostering service develop a profile of each foster family to enable children and young people to have information about a forthcoming placement before it is made.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement is made from information from the fostering service, from foster carers questionnaires. The implementation of a new and properly functioning electronic system has improved the payments to foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

At the last inspection carers expressed concern regarding the erratic nature of their payments. The fostering service has developed a more efficient system of payments to foster carers. Holiday and festival allowances are paid in early May each year which will enable carers to make plans in advance.

One response from the questionnaires returned to the inspector commented on the lack of financial support for activities for young children. No other comments were received regarding financial issues.

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, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1,17,21,22 23,24,32,

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement is made from information gained both before and during the inspection of this fostering service. The service is appropriately staffed and those with the appropriate skills and experience manage the service.

EVIDENCE:

The Children's Guide has been reviewed and the text agreed with young people. The fostering manager told the inspector that the draft guide has not yet been distributed and further work is ongoing. The service has made a decision not to translate the guide into any other languages at this time, although the facility is there to do so if required. The inspector recommends that a single cover sheet is developed in the most commonly used languages in Barnet to explain to a child or young person that the guide can be made available to them in their desired language.

The statement of purpose seen by the inspector does not include the new skills based structure for carers. The registered provider must review the statement of purpose.

The fostering service has been re-organised since the last inspection. There are three teams, a Recruitment and Training team, a Kinship and Permanence team and a Fostering Support and Development team. Barnet Link has been incorporated into the Support and Development team of the fostering service. Kinship care has been recognised as a major part of the work of the fostering service. New training packages and the approach to children and their parents is being developed. The inspector was advised that the Kinship and Permanence team hopes to go 'live' in February 2007. Two responses from kinship carers provided the inspector with differing views of the need to access training, both responses commented on the support from the service. The new kinship team have developed an information format for their colleagues to follow and this is being rolled out through the teams to ensure that all colleagues are aware of the assessment and process of referrals.

The recruitment of foster carers has been dealt with in another part of this report. Information provided by the fostering service indicates that the service is fully staffed with permanent appointments. The out of hour's system has been reviewed and is now run by the managers of the service.

The service is also reviewing the skills of foster carers and the training manual for 2006/7 divides the training into a skills focussed approach. There is still much work to be done in this area and attempts are underway to ensure that carers fully understand and participate in the process. The last inspection report required the service to provide training portfolios for all carers and this requirement will be repeated, as the task has not yet been completed. The service has made a new appointment of an administrative assistant to provide analysis and help with the forward planning of the training programme. The registered provider must ensure that each carer has a training development plan in line with their skills and that all training is evaluated to ensure it is meeting the needs of the service.

The inspector case tracked four foster carers and saw their files and the files for the children they care for. The foster carers have two files, one for

permanent information and one as a working file. The fostering manager told the inspector that it is the duty of all the managers to select 5 files for auditing each month. She is aware that this practice has slipped and some of the files seen by the inspector had two or more copies of the same report, reports were not signed and dated in transfer/closing summaries. This problem may be part of the move to electronic data but it is important for all documents to be owned by the writer and that reports are dated. The inspector recommends that staff take responsibility for the maintenance of their files and remove unnecessary or duplicated information.

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	2

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	2
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	3
29	3

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

yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.				
No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS15	21	The fostering service provider must ensure that all job descriptions reflect the actual work carried out by the individual and the method of support and supervision provided.	31/03/07
2.	FS9	12	The fostering service provider must review the contents of the fostering handbook to ensure that all policies and procedures are up to date. Specific attention must be given to those related to the protection of children. This requirement is repeated from the last inspection.	31/03/07
3.	FS12	11[a]	The fostering service provider must ensure that within the multi agency approach to carers all information regarding the health and development of a looked after child is given to the foster carer without delay.	31/03/07
4.	FS1	3	The fostering service provider must review the statement of purpose to ensure it includes the new approach to skills based fostering.	31/03/07

5.	FS13	16[1]	The fostering service provider must ensure that the service supports the educational attainment of all children placed with foster carers.	31/03/07
6.	FS9	27	The fostering service provider must ensure that each foster carer has an individual safe caring policy before they have a child placed with them.	31/03/07
7.	FS22	28	The fostering service provider must ensure that all foster carers enter into a written agreement (foster care agreement), which covers all the matters specified in Schedule 5. This requirement is repeated from the last inspection.	31/03/07
8.	FS23	17(1)	The fostering service provider must ensure that each carer has a training development plan in line with their skills and that all training is evaluated to ensure it is meeting the needs of the service. This requirement is repeated from the last inspection.	31/03/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS9	It is recommended that the fostering service provider remind their foster carers of the core policies and procedures in place whilst awaiting the new foster carer's handbook.
2.	FS1	It is recommended that the service considers developing and introducing a single cover sheet in the most commonly used languages in Barnet, to explain to a child or young person that the guide can be made available to them in their desired language.

3.	FS11	It is recommended that the fostering service develop a profile of each foster family to enable children and young people to have information about a forthcoming placement before it is made.
4.	FS25	It is recommended that staff are reminded of their responsibility for the maintenance of their files and remove unnecessary or duplicated information where appropriate.

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