



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

London Borough of Harrow Fostering Services

**429-433 Pinner Road
North Harrow
Middx
HA1 4HN**

Lead Inspector
Bernard Burrell

Announced Inspection
13th December 2005 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service London Borough of Harrow Fostering Services

Address 429-433 Pinner Road
North Harrow
Middx
HA1 4HN

Telephone number 020 8863 5544

Fax number 020 8424 8054

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) London Borough of Harrow

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

No. of places registered (if applicable) 0

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 21st February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Harrow Fostering Service guide outlined the various areas of its aims, structure, principles of the services, tasks of foster carers and range of services provided to children and young people.

The key objectives of the service according to the Statement of Purpose are to provide: safe and appropriate foster care placements for children looked after by the borough, to identify and coordinate placements of looked after children, recruit, assess, train and support foster carers, plus raise the profile of fostering in Harrow.

The Fostering and Family Link team service is part of the Children's Services within the borough's social services department. The main office is located in north Harrow with easy access to public transportation services.

The service is staffed by a group manager with responsibility for strategic quality improvement and assurance, a group manager for provision, a vacant service manager (fostering and adoption) post, a locum practice manager, supervising social workers, development officer, a kinship social worker, practice manager (family link), supervising social worker (family link) and support and administrative officers. The fostering service panel has members with professional experience in children social work and other relevant professionalism.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection took place over three days plus attendance at a panel meeting of the fostering service. The inspectors met with a group of foster carers, home visit and received written comments from the children, young people and foster carers. The inspectors also had feedback from two independent fostering agencies that works with the local authority fostering service. In addition, the inspectors interviewed and had briefings with staff and senior managers of the fostering and children services, plus staff in the human resources department and the IT section.

The inspection findings indicated that the local authority has continued to make noticeable and commendable progress in its work with foster carers and the looked after children and young people. Good progress has been made to reorganise the staffing and management structure of the service with the objective of making it more focused.

What the service does well:

The service has appropriate structure and systems in place that help to focus the direction of the work of the fostering service. The service continues to develop the family link service which is providing much needed support to service users.

The service provides relevant information such as the Looked After Newsletter to the children and young people, advocacy guide and leaflets for children five to 12 years and 12 years and older, plus the Children's Guide.

The service also provides adequate guides and information about the family link placement service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Statement of Purpose and Complaints Procedures have been completed. There is better organisation of the fostering service, including re-organisation of the staffing structure.

Good effort is being made to seek the views of the foster carers through the use of questionnaires. The service is also making better efforts to listen and respond to the needs of foster carers and has helped to establish the Foster Carers Association. It is expected this will provide additional support and forum for the foster carers, plus improve the communication between the carers and the service.

There is now better organisation and operation of the fostering panel with members who have relevant experience and professional background. The

organisation of files and administrative records at the fostering service has improved and managed better.

A system for unit cashing is now in place plus adequate funding has been requested to help ensure quality performance and outcomes are achieved.

Some improvements have been made in the recruitment of foster carers to provide respite breaks and also meet the needs of looked after children with disabilities.

Good effort is been made to develop the Family Link Service and provide much needed support to families needing respite help with caring for children with disabilities.

There is now evidence of closer working relationship between the children in need team and the fostering/family placement services

Thirteen foster carers have now completed the NVQ level 3-Caring for Children and Young People training, 3 others offered the training and 6 expected to complete the training by January 2006.

Good effort is made through the 50/50 project to help ensure that staff have easy access to the latest research developments in social care with emphasis on the needs of Black Minority Ethnic Communities (BMEC).

What they could do better:

The inspection findings indicated work is still needed to improve the staffing of the service and stability of the staffing teams. There is also need for more effective recruitment and retention of social work staff with relevant skills and experience in children social work.

Professional training and development opportunities must also be provided to help enhance the skills and knowledge of the social work staff, including recruitment of a training officer to coordinate training and development needs in the teams.

Continued improvement is needed in the communication between the service and its foster carers including the level and quality of support offered to foster carers that enables them to feel valued plus create a culture where they feel free to complain, criticise or make contributions about the service development.

There is need for more focus on the outcomes for individual children and young people in the same way good effort is made to develop policies, procedures and structural reorganisation of the systems and processes.

There is need for review of the reassessment of foster carers and the placement matching criteria to help achieve better outcomes for the children

and young people. There is also need for more targeted training for foster carers in disability issues plus recruitment of foster carers with experience working with disabilities and other differences.

Improvement is needed to help ensure that case recordings, including recordings of supervisory visits made to foster care placements are up to date and fully completed by the supervising social workers and foster carers. In addition, improvement is also needed in the time it takes to carry out assessments of new foster carers, foster carers review and cases going to the panel for consideration.

Better monitoring and auditing of case files should help to ensure that relevant parties sign all placement and contractual agreements. The agency must ensure it makes better effort to provide relevant and necessary background information to foster carers about the looked after children and young people to be placed.

Improvement is also needed to help ensure the service fulfils its statutory obligation to keep the CSCI informed of all notifiable incidents affecting the children, young people, foster carers or the service in general. The service will also need to ensure that the views of all looked after children- where possible- are sought and recorded on case files.

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 outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

The service ensures its foster carers are provided with clear guidelines and information about how to monitor, promote and safeguard the health and development of each child/young person being looked after. The service places good attention and emphasis on ensuring that the health care needs of looked after children and young people are adequately catered for.

EVIDENCE:

The service ensures that its foster carers are fully aware of their obligation to promote and safeguard the health of the children and young people being looked after. The evidence seen by the inspectors indicated that signed parental consent to medical treatment is sought-where possible- as part of the placement agreement. In addition, at the Placement Planning Meeting, all ongoing medical needs are discussed and medical dates are confirmed. The GP details and other medical information for each child and young person are established in the event of re-registration.

The evidence also indicated that supervising social workers ensure that they have recorded details of the health care services in the areas where the carers live. In addition, if a child is under school age, confirmation of where and by whom the child will receive health-visiting service is also confirmed.

The service has appointed a specialist nurse to work with the looked after children and young people. According to the information provided by the service, the nurse has reviewed all Children Looked After health processes to help ensure that the foster carers and the looked after children are supported in having their health assessments up to date. The nurse also arranges for all health assessments and reviews to be undertaken.

In addition, the fostering service provides a mental health screening tool- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)- that is used to help identify those children and young people at risk of developing mental health problems.

This exercise helps the service to put in place appropriate and timely intervention action plans. The evidence provided by the fostering service also indicated that a Primary Mental Health Worker has been employed to support the looked after children and young people. The worker undertakes brief focussed interventions and offers advice and guidance to social workers and carers. The mental health worker also maintain regular contact with the looked after children and young people specialist nurse.

In addition, the supervisory social workings recordings showed examples of foster carers seeking the advice and guidance of the fostering service to help manage health care issues related to some children and young people. The foster carers who met with the inspectors gave satisfactory examples of how they help to monitor and promote the health of the looked after children and young people.

The inspectors were concerned about the environmental condition at one foster carers' home where two looked after children and a young person were placed. The inspectors' communicated their concerns to the interim manager of the service. The findings indicated that more thorough observation of the home environment must be carried out by the supervising social workers at all times. The foster service already has the relevant monitoring tools for this to be done.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3, 8, 9, 15.

The service now benefits from a restructured management team that aims to make it more focused with the objective of achieving better outcomes for the looked after children and young people. However, the criteria for matching child to carer was not in place and there was need for clarity among the supervising social workers about their roles and responsibilities.

There was good evidence of pre-employment checks for staff by the human resources staff team to help ensure the suitability of people working in the service.

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the service at the time of this inspection has been employed as a locum since October 2005. A major staff restructuring exercise has taken place in November 2005 and staff are now offering specialist input from the various sections of the fostering and family kinship teams. The Fostering Assessment Team at the time of this inspection had 1 assessment worker plus 1 vacancy. There were 3 supervising social workers and 1 duty worker. The inspectors were informed that 12 prospective carers were waiting to be assessed. There was however no structure or plan in place to employ independent social workers to help clear the backlog of assessments that needed to be completed within the required timescale and the stated objectives of the service.

The standard practice across fostering services is that assessments should be carried out within 6 to 9 months from initial date of assessment to the panel date. The findings indicated that Harrow Fostering service continues to have

shortfall in this area. The panel has also identified this shortfall as an area needing urgent improvement.

The team restructuring in November 2005 resulted in the roles and responsibilities of staff been less generic and more specialist. There is now a designated Placement Officer with responsibility for ensuring appropriate matching and placements take place. However, the inspection findings indicated there were no clearly defined job descriptions in place or guidance outlining the criteria for matching or monitoring placements of children and young people being looked after.

There was also no evidence to verify that job descriptions and training have been provided to staff since the restructuring exercise has taken place. In addition, the post of training and development worker was vacant at the time of this inspection. The inspector's discussion with supervising social workers within the service also indicated there is still a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities. The findings indicated that some workers were carrying out their roles more as 'befrienders' to the foster carers, as opposed to ensuring comprehensive monitoring of the placements.

In addition, the inspectors noted from the interviews conducted with staff plus examination of case records, that there was lack of evidence to demonstrate how or if foster carers were challenged about 'poor practices' or supported to work with differences in relation to race, culture, food or religion.

The inspection findings also found no evidence from the supervisory recordings or discussions with staff to verify that they were monitoring how foster carers were spending monies allocated for the placements- or making efforts to encourage saving accounts for the looked after children and young people. In addition, none of the foster carers who met with the inspectors confirmed this scheme was in place in their respective foster care homes.

The inspectors were satisfied that the required pre-employment checks and references for all staff in the service- except the locum manager- were carried out satisfactorily by the human resources team based at the Civic Centre.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7,13

The fostering service values diversity and cultural differences. Good efforts are been made to help promote these values in most areas of its work but more work is needed to help ensure all foster carers work to implement these objectives.

There are effective programmes in place that is helping to promote and achieve positive learning and educational outcomes for the children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The findings of the inspection indicated that on one hand, good effort is been made to help ensure children and young people are placed in foster care homes where there ethnic, cultural and other diversity needs can be met. However, the inspectors examined a number of case review recordings, interviews with foster carers and supervising social workers plus visit to a foster care home. The findings indicated that the cultural and diversity needs of some children are not been fully acknowledge and met. Some supervisory recordings made no mention of how this area is been addressed by some foster carers. More work is needed to help ensure that all supervising social workers have the necessary skills and knowledge of how to work with foster carers to help achieve better diversity and cultural outcomes for the looked after children. This should be in line with the started objectives of the fostering service.

Among the comments made by some foster carers who communicated with the inspectors were: 'once a child is placed with a family, more assessment should be necessary to help ensure the child and the foster carer are bonded.' 'The

service should try and organise pre-planned placements meetings with everyone to see how best we can meet that child's needs plus make the transition easier for the child.'

The inspection findings also identified the need for joint training in working with diversity involving the supervising social workers, field social workers and foster carers. This should aim to ensure that the placements are fully able to meet the diversity needs of all the children and young people more effectively.

The Local Harrow Authority has devised an education programme in conjunction with GATSBY- a research and charitable organisation- that works in partnership with the National Children's Bureau. Money is provided to enable the local authority to develop long term plans in leisure and other activities to help the children and young people develop positive self-image.

The inspectors were updated about the work of the GATSBY project by the main staff coordinator. He provided evidence of the publicity and outreach work been carried out. These included leaflets, newsletters and posters outlining activities the young people have been involved in. In addition, there was also evidence of artwork been carried out by some of the young people at the Tate Gallery in London. The inspectors were told that a number of the children/young people gave their time at weekends and holidays between April and July 2005 to produce their work that was displayed at the Tate.

A Connections Worker is now based in the Leaving Care Team to offer support and guidance to young people to enable them to pursue educational or vocational programmes. The fostering service and the young people also benefit from the local authority link with Welfare Call. This service makes contacts with local schools to monitor if the young people are attending. Children and young people who have more than 25 days absence from school receive a letter asking for feedback regarding their absence. The evidence provided by the fostering service indicated that school attendance for the looked after children and young people average ninety percent. For those children/young people not in school, the local authority has a designated teacher who identifies alternative and remedial educational and learning provisions.

The education department also has a Rapid Response Team whose role is to provide intervention programmes to minimise the risk of children/young people being permanently excluded. There is also an assessment team that works with the looked after children and young people who are statemented. During a visit to a carer's home, the inspector noted that the carer was not aware this service was available to support children and young people who may need to access the statementing procedure. Other foster carers who met with the inspector were also not aware of this service.

The inspectors were told that training is planned for foster carers in February 2006 and information on the Parent Partnership will also be given to foster carers.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10, 11

The fostering service encourages, supports and promotes contact arrangements between looked after children/young people and their birth parents

Additional work is needed to help develop further, the consultation process between the service and its foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

The foster carers who met with the inspectors gave a range of examples of how they are helping to promote contacts between the looked after children/young people, their birth parents, relatives and known sibling groups. However, a few foster carers raised concerns regarding what some described as 'insensitivity' of care planning for children who were placed together in the same foster homes, but later separated by the fostering staff and children social workers. One foster carer noted that no arrangements were been made by the foster service for new additions to the sibling group or contact arrangements between all siblings. The inspectors wanted to examined the case files of a sibling group highlighted to verify this concern but were told by the managers that the files had been taken to court.

The foster carers who met with the inspectors, reported that they often do not feel the service consult with them about what is going on. However, the carers stated they are hoping the newly formed Foster Carers Association will change this situation. Some foster carers stated they would like to see more direct consultation and better efforts made to seek their views about how the service is operated.

Some of the children and young people who communicated with the inspectors reported that their foster carers sometimes or rarely ask them their opinions

and ideas about their foster care. They also reported that the supervising and looked after children social workers sometimes, but not always asked for their views about their foster care, or how the fostering service could be made better. Similarly, some children and young people reported that their social workers sometimes see them on their own and ask their opinions about their experiences; but this was not always often.

Several of the children and young people also reported to the inspectors that they have not been told how to make a complaint about how they are being looked after, or how to get in touch with the CSCI. Some stated they have been given a copy of the children's guide, others stated they have not. However, the inspectors noted that the service has produced up to date and relevant guides for the children and young people, written in appropriate style and communication format to match the age groupings. There are also information within the guides of how the children and young people can make complaints and to whom.

The findings indicated more work should be done during the supervisory home visits to remind the children and young people of these guidelines plus how to exercise their rights in foster care. The service should also make better efforts to seek the views and opinions of the looked after children at all times about their experiences and the way the service is operated.

The inspectors attended an Open Day at the Leaving Care Team and met with several young people, staff, the director of children services and a councillor of the local authority. The inspectors were informed on that day of a consultation meeting arranged for that evening to give young people the opportunity to share their views and concerns.

The inspectors received very positive comments and updates from several young people at the Open Day about their experiences in foster care. Several staff at the Leaving Care Team commented favourable about the work been done and gave examples of the progress been made by the young people.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

14,29

The Leaving Care Team works effectively to promote and assist young people with the transition from foster care to adulthood. Foster carers' allowance is paid to the carers as outlined in the carer's handbook.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors visited the Leaving Care Team Open Day and met with a number of young people, staff and senior managers of the children's services and local council. The staff commented favourably about the support and structures that are in place to help them fulfil their roles and responsibilities. They gave examples of various positive outcomes achieved by the young people.

Equally, the young people who spoke with the inspectors during the visit gave a range of positive examples about how the staff support them to pursue their educational goals and finding work placements for example. The evidence received by the inspectors also verified that the staff also offer invaluable support to teenage mothers. One teen age mother told the inspectors that her support worker helped her find a place on a college training course that starts in February 2006. She stated this was ' great help and motivational support' for her. The inspectors were told of other incentives that are also in place to reward the young people for keeping focus on their individual goals and objectives. Free driving lessons is been planned as a reward incentive in the near future.

A number of the young people also spoke of their satisfaction with the support they have received from the Independent Life Skills training, which included

modules in budgeting and domestic living skills. The inspection findings also showed that the young people have been supported to establish and maintain close links with organisations such as Stoneham. This organisation assists young people with the transition from foster care placements to semi-independent housing for those whom it is considered need additional support with the move to independent living.

The inspection findings also noted that a number of relevant policies, procedures and guidance relating to the work of the Leaving Care Team were available for inspection. The findings also indicated the team works uniformly both in their practices and the recording of files that included up to date pathway plans for the young people.

The inspectors noted that the carers handbook had clear guidelines about the payment structure for foster carers and the various allowances paid to carers and the looked after children. The reports and comments received from foster carers indicated that the payments are made, but are often 'inadequate and not in line with inflation or some of the additional expenses they incur.'

Management

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

2,5,17,19,21,22,23,24, 25, 26,32.

The managers of the service have relevant and appropriate professional experience and training. The fostering service now has a more stable management structure that is helping to cultivate stability and guidance of the service but shortfalls still exist in management and staffing cover.

There is need for closer attention to the training needs of staff. Good effort is being made to cultivate and develop the support services offered to foster carers, but more work is needed to make supervision and monitoring of placements more focused on the skill of foster carers and the outcomes for the

looked after children and young people. Administrative records and organisation of case files are managed much better with the introduction of new IT systems to help create better working tools for staff. However, further improvement is needed to help ensure all cases recordings are up to date. The service must also ensure the CSCI is kept informed of any notifiable incidents affecting the looked after children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The inspection findings indicated that the fostering service is managed much better with clear lines of accountability and more cooperative working relations between the various children social services. The service has the following staff in place at the time of this inspection. The group manager provisions, interim practice manager, six supervising social workers, a kinship coordinator, placement officer, family link practice manager, two support officers and administrative officers.

The group manager provisions has indicated that effort is been made to ensure the service is adequately and fully staffed with ongoing internal and external recruitment. In addition, opportunities have been offered to internal staff to join the service and receive relevant professional training during their employment. The inspection findings indicated more work is needed to help identify and provide relevant training for staff already working in the service, including those hoping to undertake further professional training.

The service has not been able to have all its foster carers reviews carried out on time because of staff shortage. This has affected the time it takes to complete foster carers assessments and bring them to the panel for consideration. To help managed these shortfalls; proposal has been made that only the first foster carer annual review or significant changes in circumstances/events that has impacted on a looked after child/young person will be presented to the panel.

All other foster carers' reviews have been presented to the service manger for re-approval. The information received by the inspectors indicated that to help resolve this problem, consultation would take place involving the Family Placement Service, Children In Need staff, panel members, foster carers and independent reviewing officers. The timescale for implementation is planned for April 2006.

The inspectors met with a group of foster carers at the office of the fostering service. They were happy to talk about their experiences and issues they were concerned about. Most reported they felt supported by their supervising social and link workers. One carer stated that 'even if you are unable to speak to your supervising social worker, the duty or another member of the Family Placement Unit will try to help you.' Another carer reported that 'most times a

social worker or link worker will visit if there is a crisis, but sometimes there are delays.' Several other carers gave favourable responses about the support they received from the social work and link staff. Many gave examples of the training they have been offered and undertaken to help enhance their knowledge and skills.

All expressed concern that the 'frequency of changes in management and staffing of the service create inconsistency and lack of focus on the outcomes for the children and young people.' All the foster carers indicated they would like the service to develop a 'foster care buddy/mentor scheme' to help new foster carers just starting out.

The inspectors noted that the service has made good improvements reorganising the case and administrative records of the looked after children, young people and their carers. The inspectors were also shown practical demonstration of the new IT system-Framework-I that is already being used in some sections of the social services. Among the main objectives is to create a paperless work environment. The new system will also enable better monitoring and sharing of case records and the provision of timely and accessible updates within the children and family teams.

The inspectors noted that on a few case files, recordings were not updated and some supervisory review records were incomplete and did not have records of some children and young people's views. The service has also not been consistent with keeping the CSCI notified of a few significant events affecting the welfare of a few children and young people being looked after.

The local authority has made some progress with improving the main public entrance and lobby area of the children and family services office in North Harrow with private meeting rooms. Additional work is still needed to improve the overall ambience and environment of the work areas for the staff in the various sections of the fostering service.

The inspection findings indicated that good effort has been made to develop the Family Link Team. This service operates within the fostering service and provides short breaks for disabled children and respite for the parents and family. The family link carers are approved by the fostering panel and are assessed in a similar way to foster carers, but with an adapted form F, plus assessment that is directed to their roles as respite carer of a disabled child.

The service has recognised that it needs to do more to ensure the Family Link Service is adequately staffed and more carers with experience in caring for children with disabilities are recruited. The service currently has a shortage of foster carers with the required experience in looking after children with disabilities.

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	3
8	2
9	3
15	3
30	X

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

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	4
29	3

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

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
1	FS8	33, 34	The local authority fostering service must ensure that the placement matching criteria is kept under regular review and that this is consistently followed with each placement made	30/03/06
2	FS17	19,21	The local authority fostering service must ensure the service is adequately staffed at all times and that adequate staff are available to help monitor the placements and support the foster carers.	30/05/06
3	FS19	21	The local authority fostering service must ensure that all staff are provided with relevant and appropriate training and development to help enhance their skills and professionalism.	30/03/06
4	FS4	35, 42	The local authority fostering service must ensure that better monitoring and reviews of foster care placements and foster carers are carried out within adequate time schedule and in line with regulatory requirements. The service must also ensure that improvement is made in the	30/03/03

			timescale of initial assessment of foster carers and presentation to the panel	
5	FS25	22, 30, 43	<p>The local authority fostering service must ensure that all case records and supervisory review notes are up to date and the views of all looked after children and young people are recorded in the case files.</p> <p>The fostering service must ensure that the CSCI is kept informed of any significant or notifiable incidents affecting the service, the welfare, safety or wellbeing of the children and young people being looked after or the foster care placements.</p>	30/03/06

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	FS7	The fostering service should ensure that foster carers are provided with additional training and supervisory support about valuing diversity and differences.
2	FS11	The fostering service should ensure that further work is carried out to help develop the consultation between the service and foster carers.

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