



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Lambeth LA Fostering

**International House
6 Canterbury Crescent
Brixton
London
SW9 7QE**

Lead Inspector
Rossella Volpi.

Key Proportionate Announced Inspection

February 2007

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
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Lambeth LA Fostering
Address	International House 6 Canterbury Crescent Brixton London SW9 7QE
Telephone number	020 7926 8543
Fax number	020 7926 8537
Email address	aramsey@lambeth.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	London Borough of Lambeth
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 20 February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

This is a local authority fostering service located in an inner city area. The authority states that its vision for every child and young person in Lambeth is that: "We will enable children and young people to feel valued, happy, healthy and safe and to achieve their full potential".

To this end a key aim for the fostering service is that of providing high quality, safe, stable, local family placements. Placements able to meet diverse needs, support children in developing a healthy cultural and racial identity and well cater for children with disabilities. Lambeth also states that in striving to improve service delivery they are finding out, from children and young people themselves, their views, wishes and experiences of being in care.

Fostering is part of the children and young people's service. This was created in 2005 by integrating those departments responsible for education and social care, to better support delivery of the national 'every child matters' strategy and to provide co-ordinated care for looked after children.

The fostering service consists of a long-term fostering team (including placements with family and friends) and of a short-term fostering team, which includes recruitment and assessment of foster carers.

A brokerage team negotiates with independent fostering agencies when suitable placements are not available from Lambeth's own carers.

The premises are offices, located in the headquarters building of the "Children and Young People's" department.

At March 2006 the authority had 68 approved fostering households, providing a total of 111 places for children and young people. In addition to these, 296 places were purchased from external providers.

A high priority identified by the authority is the recruitment of new in house carers.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection's main focus was to gain an overview of the service to ascertain whether the positive findings from last year's inspection could be confirmed. The previous inspection considered the service to deliver good outcomes for children under each area inspected.

The inspection activities were mainly conducted over about 5 inspector's days in February 2007. The inspection included:

- Visits to three fostering households, where children were in placements and telephone discussion with a fourth (kinship) carer.
- Individual discussion with children and / or carers during the visits.
- Individual / small group discussion with placing and fostering supervising social workers.
- A meeting with representatives of the children's forum (one child and the corporate parenting children's development officer).
- Discussion with each member of the fostering management team, including the service manager and assistant director.
- Discussion with the divisional director.
- Discussion with a number of other officers in the directorate or external professionals, including representatives from health and education.
- Large group discussion with the fostering service's supervising social workers and business support staff.
- Inspection of a sample of children, carers and staff's files. This included case tracking for the four carers and children in placement where a visit or telephone interview had been arranged.
- Inspection of extracts from a sample of other statutory records.

Questionnaires were sent to children in placement, carers and children's social workers. Eight questionnaires were received back from children, ten from carers and two from social workers. The responses have informed this inspection.

The inspection has been informed also by a range of written documents, which the authority made available, on request from CSCI, including the service manager's own annual assessment of the service.

What the service does well:

The previous positive findings were confirmed and the service continued to perform well. It made a good or excellent contribution to promoting children's health, education, equality and ensuring that children's views and those of their families would be listened to.

Children considered that their health needs were well met. They indicated that they felt safe and well cared for where they were living. For example they said:

"My carer is always telling me what is good to be healthy or to do and I eat healthy food".

"I have been on an educational visit to Prague, Czech Republic. I really enjoyed it".

"I like living with my foster mum and I don't want to leave. Now I am always early for school, my behaviour is calm and I don't worry about moving again".

"I know that if anything happens to me then I can talk to my foster family and my social worker and I know this because my social worker told me".

These views were also shared by placing social workers. Example of comments received included:

" The carers are doing an excellent job. A real close relationship."

"(The child's) foster carer is very pro active in making sure his day-to-day needs are catered for and all his appointments with external health professionals are being supported".

"(The carer) encourages and supports X to have regular contact with her family and friends. X attends college and has a wide and varied group of friends".

Social workers and other professionals said that the service was very good at maintaining stability, promoting educational development, maintaining clear communication and boundaries. Social workers considered that equality was well promoted by a culturally diverse pool of foster carers that reflected the local population.

There was evidence of much work done with children and young people to make consultation effective.

There was much joint working with education, health and other professionals towards ensuring that looked after children would have the same opportunities as all children in the borough.

Carers praised the support received from their supervising social workers and from the professionals involved in mental / emotional health and education, working jointly with fostering.

Some representative comments were:

"They offer good support, regular visits and reviews, training for carers, they show interest in children's education".

"I chose to foster for this service on recommendation".

"The child I care for is a special needs child and the fostering service has done a lot to ensure that her educational needs are being met".

"All the children I have cared for have been successfully adopted or returned to their birth parents or family members".

"Always ready to assist in all my needs, especially my supervising social worker from whom I could not ask for more".

The senior management team had ambitious plans for the future development of the service. Although it was too early to assess whether they would be effective, it was concluded that there was good potential to achieve them.

This conclusion was reached because of the improvements already made in the last year, in some very challenging circumstances. Also because of the divisional director's very clear vision and ethos for the service, backed by a realistic and well thought out analysis of strengths and weaknesses.

What has improved since the last inspection?

In their annual assessment, management highlighted that:

- They have begun the process of updating policies and procedures, streamlining financial processes and reviewing the role of the brokerage service.
- They have ensured wider representation on the fostering panel, with a new elected member, a former looked-after young person and the looked after children's nurse.
- They have given increased priority to kinship care, including regularising approval status and providing supervision, training and development.
- The service has benefited from overall improvements in leadership and performance management within the children's social care division. This was from: the realignment into a comprehensive children and young people's service; the positive developments in corporate parenting; the implementation of ICS.

What they could do better:

In their annual assessment, management highlighted that:

- They needed to review the structure of the fostering, adoption and brokerage unit in order to reflect current needs and priorities.
- They have begun a review of the fostering and other family placement panels to improve effective scrutiny and quality assurance and to minimise delays in approvals and matching.
- They needed to recruit a permanent service manager.
- They were to begin a determined recruitment campaign for carers (due to start) in April 2007.
- They were to review allowances paid to foster carers, alongside residence order, special guardianship and adoption allowances

Additionally recommendations are made regarding some areas of management and support of carers, safeguarding (training and records) and premises.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this area was excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering services promoted the health and development of children.

EVIDENCE:

Children considered that their health needs were well met by the authority. Children said, for example:

"My foster parent knows that I am healthy and she cooks healthy food as well. So there is no need for her to ask me all the time".

"I am encouraged to be more active and given advice with regards to personal hygiene".

Placing social workers and carers rated the authority, overall, as excellent at promoting health and responding to specialist needs.

There was a range of resources available, including, for example:

- A multi-disciplinary team, which assessed health and social care needs of children with physical or learning disabilities.
- An enhanced GP service for children with complex needs.
- A specialist support service for children with autistic spectrum disorders and their families.
- A specialist drugs and substance misuse social worker.
- A specialist refugee worker from the children's and adolescents mental health service (CAMHS).

Carers, social workers and other professionals gave many examples of joint working, (to promote physical, emotional and mental health), which had

benefited children and young people. (Lambeth's holistic way of working, the improved outcomes reported for children and the esteem in which the service was held, is the reason for the rating of excellent).

It was pointed out, for instance, that the children looked after nurse (LAC nurse) had an excellent approach at encouraging reluctant young people to have their statutory medical review. She had worked closely with carers to address young people's anxiety. This had included going to the carers' homes or other venues as a way to break down possible barriers. The percentage of young people having medicals had gone up and the statistics showed continuing improvements.

Lambeth CAMHS was recognised by carers, social workers and managers as an invaluable resource. They considered that CAMHS had been significant in increasing placement stability and the number of children who could be rehabilitated home. CAMHS worked directly with children, but also they run courses on behaviour management and were available to carers and social workers for individual consultation. A clinical psychologist had been appointed to lead on behaviour management.

The psychologist managing the CAMHS team said that Lambeth had really invested in the service. The resources allocated were realistic. Emphasis was put on joint working with a range of agencies, particularly education. She also said that the feedback received from young people and carers had been positive. The training provided for carers also meant that CAMHS got to know carers well, their strengths and challenges encountered.

The above was also important, (the assistant director –assessments- pointed out), for CAMHS' developing role of contributing to the assessment of carers. This was to become more prominent in the future with Lambeth planning recruitment of designated treatment carers, to work with children with specialist emotional needs.

Lambeth was aware that the rates of teenage pregnancy had remained high. The assistant director (children looked after) discussed how they were engaging in targeted work with education, specifically about sexual health and attitudes to sexual relationships. This would also be aimed at increasing young women's confidence, self-respect and thus directly contributing to strengthening safeguarding.

The foster carers' training programme included topics on a variety of health, safety and hygiene issues. Discussion with carers pointed out that training needed still to include nutrition and food safety. However it was noted from the information provided by the service manager (in the annual assessment) that this had already been recognised. There were also plans to deliver more comprehensive support in the areas of health, hygiene and self-care for care leavers.

Health matters were addressed as part of the regular supervising social workers' visits to carers and were appraised at the children's statutory reviews. Carers were clear of their responsibility of ensuring that children would be registered with a general practitioner and would attend regular dental and optician check ups. The cases tracked showed that the children were receiving health support regarding both routine matters and specialist needs identified, consistently with their care plans. Looked after children were provided with membership of council leisure centres within the borough, thereby benefiting from reduced fees, in order to enhance opportunities for sport and exercise.

The brokerage managers discussed how they had started to work more systematically with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) partners to review IFA's performance and outcomes for children in health.

The panel had recently appointed, as one of its members, the LAC nurse, thus increasing its expertise in this area and, potentially, the rigour of scrutiny on health matters.

The health of looked after children was the subject of significant interest at members' level. A report and action plan was submitted to the council's scrutiny committee in March 2006. This work was being taken forward through the multi-agency looked after children strategy group.

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.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15

Quality in this area was good. This judgement was made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children benefited from a service that strived to safeguard them by being thorough in the approval of carers, in the recruitment of staff and that monitored that children lived in a healthy and nurturing environment.

A successful recruitment campaign of in house carers would enhance choice for children and possibly strengthen quality assurance of placements.

EVIDENCE:

Children indicated that they felt safe with their carers and well cared for where they were living. This view was also shared by placing social workers.

For example children said:

"The place is good, everything is well organised, we understand each other".

"I feel I can trust the people I am living with".

"She (the carer) makes sure I am alright, makes sure I am in a safe place. Makes sure I don't feel hungry and asks me to tell her if there is anything wrong. She also makes sure I go to school on time".

The young children seen in placement appeared at ease in their environment.

Another younger child met spoke of how at home she was with her carers and said: *"I like my carer"*. A young person interviewed spoke highly about his carers. He said that he liked to live there, that he was consulted, supported with education, went on holiday with the carers and was involved in a range of leisure activities.

Additional important safeguards were the high priority given to consultation and contact with families and the joint working with education and health.

Supervising social workers' visits were regular, reviews on time and unannounced visits had been made. Health and safety checks of foster homes were conducted. (This was noted from records and also confirmed by the business support team, who provided management information on performance targets).

The sample of carers (who were part of the case tracking exercise) considered that social workers were diligent in monitoring how the children were cared for.

For example, one carer, speaking of the visits by the placing and supervising social workers, said: *"Nothing escapes those two"*. The carer also confirmed that support and monitoring had much improved in the past year, while before high turnover of staff had impinged negatively on that.

A young person seen confirmed that his social worker visited regularly and saw him on his own. He said that his current social worker was *"The best I had"*.

The evidence reviewed suggested that carers were providing good care in suitable accommodation. This was the view of placing social workers interviewed or who responded by sending a questionnaire. They also considered that the fostering service was committed to and effective in sharing information, worked well with the children's social workers and had been successful in increasing stability of placements.

Examples of comments received were:

"The fostering team monitors the placements and ensures all carers are receiving regular training and have support from the team link worker".

"Good communication between foster carer, link worker and young person's social worker".

"X (the child) was involved in the process of identifying a foster carer geared towards his concerns, i.e. he did not want to be placed too far away from his immediate family. ... He is now content that he knows exactly where he will be staying from week to week and this contributes to his self esteem".

"All the young people that I have worked with in foster care have been in the same placement since coming into care. Lambeth promotes permanency in foster placements; this ensures stability for the young people".

Matching and provision of suitable carers were considered good at the previous inspection. Indications that this had continued were:

- The positive comments received about the care of the children.
- That social workers and carers spoke positively of the attention Lambeth put into carers' ability to promote the child's race, culture and gender.
- That the authority strived to offer choice of placements.
- That social workers rated stability of placements as excellent.

Lambeth was aware that there were some significant gaps in the range of carers available for the needs of children referred. In particular there was an urgent need to recruit more white carers and carers specialising in babies. The imminently to start in-house short break family link service (for children with disabilities) would be another priority for recruitment.

Lambeth had an ambitious project to increase the number of in-house carers by 50, by 2008. Preparations were being made to launch the recruitment campaign in April 2007.

This would be a challenging target; its realization might be affected by success in the recruitment of social work and managerial staff and stabilisation of temporary arrangements. (This is referred to below also, in the area on management).

Lambeth purchased a large number of places from independent fostering agencies (IFAs). Some professionals interviewed saw that this might undermine safeguarding as the quality assurance mechanisms used for Lambeth's own carers could not, mostly, be used for carers in the independent sector. In the longer term, Lambeth was planning to reduce reliance on the independent sector, as a consequence of the expected success in recruitment of new carers. Lambeth was also in discussion with other local authorities to form a consortium to enable better use of existing carers.

The team managers and the brokerage managers gave evidence of a range of performance indicators to monitor how individual children's needs were being met by the IFAs. Lambeth's active engagement with the IFAs, involving them in meetings, training and a number of projects, were also important contributors to the monitoring and partnership working.

It was particularly noted that the divisional director herself had already visited eight foster carers, speaking to children directly and encouraging them to contact her with anything they might want to raise. Children had taken up the offer and there was evidence of comments they sent. Not only this was an additional step in safeguarding, but also it conveyed to all in the service a clear ethos of a child-centred way of working and commitment to individual children.

Lambeth had a policy to renew criminal record bureau checks (CRB) for carers, adult members of household and support carers at least every 3 years. The

sample looked at confirmed that this had been done. There was an electronic system in place for flagging up when CRB checks were due.

In the cases tracked all children had been placed consistently with the carers' terms of approval. It was also positive that, although the housing stock in parts of the borough presented challenges, there was a clear policy on sharing of rooms. All foster children would have their own room, unless siblings and sharing seen as appropriate for them. The service manager said that the only exceptions to this policy had been some brief overlaps in isolated cases.

Carers were notified in writing of the decision to approve and of the terms. In one case tracked, the date of approval had been recorded on the file and on the register as the date when panel recommended it. In fact the decision maker only approved the carer nearly two months later, because of an outstanding check. The issue is that if a carer is recorded as approved, while they are not, there could be a risk that children might be placed before scrutiny on suitability is completed. (See recommendation).

Lambeth had a robust recruitment and vetting procedure for staff. It comprised interview, written references, CRBs and other checks. Random inspection of a sample of staff's file (including panel members) showed that the procedure had mostly been adhered to. In two cases it was noted that the CRBs on the file had been conducted by a previous authority. Discussion with the compliance officer assured that this was no longer an accepted practice in Lambeth and that the authority would conduct their own CRB. (See recommendation).

All fostering social work staff and team managers interviewed during the inspection showed great commitment to providing a good service and evident child focused ways of working. The assistant director and the service manager were satisfied with the range of expertise and skills in the team.

The fostering panel was not observed on this occasion. However staff were confident about the panel's role in safeguarding children. The panel benefited from an independent chair and a range of members with differing backgrounds.

The decision maker, staff said, would carefully consider the assessment again in the light of the panel's recommendations and would not approve unless satisfied. It was noted that this had happened, in one of the cases tracked.

There had been very little recruitment of new carers in the past year. The divisional director was aware that, in the large-scale recruitment planned, a highly robust gate keeping at each stage of the assessment process would be critical in safeguarding children. Furthermore Lambeth was in the process of regularising the situation regarding a number of historical kinship placements, so as to ensure that proper supervision and safeguards

would be applied. The process was to be completed within the following 3 months.

The divisional director discussed additional safeguards that were being put in place. These mainly related to training for panel, periodic review of the panel's quality assurance role and patterns the panel might have identified. Also, in her role as decision maker, if in doubt about any parts of the soundness of an assessment, she would ask a manager (external to the fostering team) to reappraise it.

The points above and the fact that the decision maker's role had been placed at director level, indicated that there would be a final rigorous scrutiny before carers would be approved.

Lambeth had identified the management of allegations against carers as an area needing reviewing. The service manager said that policies and procedures had been updated and were being finalised. Emphasis was being put in reaching a better balance between the paramount need to keep the child safe, but also not to disrupt a placement unless in the interest of the child.

Discussion with the team managers indicated that the four allegations received against carers had been properly dealt with. Discussion with child protection managers gave an overview of how allegations were followed up. They considered that management had taken appropriate action when concerns or complaints had been raised. They said that reviews, following allegations, were conducted well, were timely, based on sound risk assessments and all agencies cooperated.

The child protection managers considered that the concept of quality assurance had developed greatly in the last 12 to 18 months. The use of electronic management information systems had supported this.

This view was shared by the fostering team managers. They regarded safeguarding to be rigorous, robust and continuously reviewed. They said that they had easy access to independent professionals when it was difficult to identify if complaints / concerns raised were allegations or not. They discussed how they were contributing in the developing of a performance management culture in the fostering service and the significant role that the assistant director had had in starting it.

There was a need to confirm understanding of the procedures to be followed and the sharing of information when complaints or concerns were raised about independent fostering agencies carers living outside Lambeth. (See recommendation).

It was also raised that although staff and carers had received child protection training, refreshers were needed and such training should be on a rolling

programme. Joint training with placing social workers, at least in some areas, might enhance consistency in understanding and responding to concerns. (See recommendation).

A local safeguarding board had been established, improving multi-agency working. The board had published a safe parenting handbook, which was distributed to all foster carers.

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.

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

7, 13

Quality in this area was good. This judgement was made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Diversity was valued and efforts made to accommodate children's individual needs. High priority continued to be given to meeting each young person's individual educational needs.

EVIDENCE:

Staff and all involved in the service, with whom contact was made during the inspection, demonstrated commitment to and a clear understanding of the complex issues regarding equality and diversity. This was in the context of enabling children and young people to develop a positive self identity, respect for themselves and others and pride in their heritage.

The plan to expand services for children with disabilities and the recognition of the importance of maintaining contact with families and friends, were also other factors supporting equality and diversity.

Lambeth was aware of the need for more white carers and was taking steps to recruit them, while in the meantime using the independent sector to ensure that children would be placed in a culturally appropriate environment.

Extracts of policies read during the inspection regarding placements, emphasised the need to work closely with families and for intensive work to return children to their families, unless not in the interest of children.

The policies emphasised the need to take account of heritage of children from ethnic backgrounds who are a minority in this country. It was stressed however that placements must consider all children's needs, including previous history, wishes and feelings and it would not be enough to mainly identify cultural and racial needs.

A comment was made by a foster carers' household, backed by examples from their experiences, regarding Lambeth needing to give equal emphasis to counteracting prejudices that children might have regarding gay and lesbian people. This would also better support the formation of a healthy sexual identity for all children. This was related to the senior management team during the inspection's feedback and they assured that the comment would be taken seriously and inform practice. However it is recognised that this would be a longer-term process.

A consistent message from staff, carers and other professionals was that Lambeth had made much recent progress in getting better responsiveness from schools. This was to ensure that children would go to the right school for them and would be provided with additional support.

Children considered that they received the right help with education. Placing social workers generally saw promoting educational development as a particularly strong area in the Lambeth's fostering service, which had resulted in excellent outcomes for children and young people. For example, in one case tracked, the social worker said that the child received from the carers:

"High, but reasonable expectations about education. Advice and help with homework. Carers encourage high goals. They advocate to obtain best opportunities and life chances".

Other representative comments were:

"Education a real strength".

"Much improved in development" (for a baby).

In one of the 3 cases tracked regarding education, it was noted that the young person had received an award for the most improved pupil in his year (2006). The young person himself spoke highly of the help and support he received and his achievements.

The Lambeth education pledge for looked after children clearly outlined the need for participation in sports, arts and other positive activities in and outside school hours.

Lambeth celebrated children and young people's achievements annually with an award ceremony. This gave due recognition to the efforts and attainments

(not necessarily all academic) that a number of the children and young people had accomplished, sometimes overcoming, or in spite of, major challenges. This, it was noted directly from what young people said, meant a lot to the young people, while their excitement and pride was truly inspirational.

The improvements in stability of placements and the policy of keeping children in borough, managers said, had been central also to promoting education by not disrupting existing school placements. Lambeth schools also gave priority to admission of looked after children.

It was understood that the authority's 2006 annual performance assessment had pointed out that there had been an improvement in outcomes for young people, although standards at some stages still needed to rise.

However, in the remit of the fostering inspection, which mainly concentrated on the support individual children were receiving and the outcomes for them, there continued to be evidence of some excellent work (including much joint working with health), that had benefited children, as it was also the case in the previous inspection. (This is the reason for the score of 4 for education).

The commitment of carers was evident and means were being put in place to strengthen their ability to promote educational achievements. For example training and one to one support to them or the children. The provision of personal computers was extended to carers of primary school age children. Monitoring of school attendance led to improved communication with carers and relevant local authority staff.

From the statistics provided by the service manager, regarding children in foster care, it was noted that the percentage of up-to-date personal educational plans had increased with over 80% of children having one in place at the time of inspection.

83.3% and 30.1% of young people, whose last placement was in foster care, achieved, respectively: 1 GCSE at A-G and 5 GCSEs at A-C.

In March 2006, 75% of year 6 pupils had received their first choice secondary school place. This was an increase of 18% on the previous year. 45 care leavers were attending university.

The end part of a joint training session (with another local authority) for carers was observed. This was on how to support children with homework and revision strategies. 14 carers attended. Carers participated and at the end they said that the session had been very helpful. This was the first of a regular set of seminars / workshops; the next month's topic was going to be on maths, English and developments in schools.

Overall there was evidence that Lambeth gave high priority to improving educational outcomes, as detailed in their 'Promise to Looked After Children' and saw the role of the foster carers as central in achieving this.

Lambeth was aware of what still needed addressing, but plans were being drawn regarding those. Priorities had been identified. For example:

- The relative underachievement of African-Caribbean boys and young men, (also disproportionately represented in the looked-after population).
- The need to continue to work with carers who have not themselves had positive experiences of education.
- Greater emphasis to the role of the carer in enhancing and promoting a child's education when recruiting and assessing new carers.
- Improving the understanding of the social emotional impact of care on pupil achievement and looking for practical solutions to improve outcomes.

Rates of pay for carers (discussed below in the report) might have a negative effect, if not reviewed, in the ability of carers to support education in its wider sense (i.e.: sports, leisure, holidays, cultural outings, etc.)

The fostering service was not yet providing a short break service for children with disabilities, but was at the final stages of planning it. Discussion with the manager, who had been the lead person in the short break project, gave evidence of the commitment and enthusiasm that were being channelled in establishing a service reflective of what potential users wanted, after conducting extensive and continuing consultation.

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.

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

Quality in this area was excellent. This judgement was made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service had continued to take steps to enable children to maintain contact with family, friends and other significant people, as set out in care plans and foster care agreements. The service promoted consultation.

EVIDENCE:

The young person with whom this was discussed confirmed that he had received the necessary support to keep in touch with family members, but also that his wishes had been heard.

The placing social workers confirmed that the carers had well facilitated contact for the young person and worked according to the care plan. He also said that the carers had “..continued to support those young people who had moved away to semi-independent accommodation, in spite of the challenges encountered in placement”.

It was noted that one parent, seen during a visit, was made to feel welcomed and engaged in free flowing discussion with the carer about routines for her baby.

The service manager said that in the last year work had been targeted by supervising social workers and managers, with carers, regarding carers’ responsibilities to maintain family links where this was part of the care plan. This was achieved through supervision and training, through the carers’ support group and Lambeth foster care association.

Generally, from discussion with carers and staff and inspection of records, it was evident that carers understood the complex issues involved in contact and the importance of ascertaining the wishes of children and families. CAHMS provided additional expert support and consultation in dealing with matters relating to contact, placement moves, attachment and other issues.

The assistant director outlined the high level of resources allocated to enhancing contact. He described how contact took a prominent part in the placements' panel discussion and of how this had resulted in continuously improving outcomes for children.

(The emphasis placed on contact, as outlined above and evidence of some complex pieces of work that took into account needs and wishes of individual children, in an area that was already considered good at the previous inspection, is the reason for the score of 4 on this occasion).

Children said that they were consulted and that their opinions counted. For example, some comments received were:

"For the moment everything is good, but when I am sharing my opinion she (the carer) does take notice of it."

"Sometimes I don't really have anything to say, but when I do she listens to me".

"If I tell my social worker something they usually listen and take notice of my opinions."

Children said that they knew how to complain and would be able to raise concerns or worries. For example they said:

"I can make my own decisions as to choosing who to tell if I have a problem. It has also been made clear to me that I can bring any problems I have to my social worker".

If unhappy would talk to .. "My family, because I know they can help with any problem I might have".

"I usually go to my tutor from school, but I know I can tell other people as well as my social worker or my foster carer".

"I know where and whom, to go and talk to".

The service manager said that levels of children's participation in statutory reviews had increased. (75% April-Dec 2006). The independent reviewing officers (IROs), were required to meet children privately before all statutory reviews. One IRO had piloted the use of specialist software in consulting with children and this was to be extended to children with social and communication disorders.

It was a procedural requirement that children be seen alone on all statutory visits by their social workers. Independent visitors were provided to children

and young people with no regular family or other outside contact. Advocates were provided to assist children with complaints.

Groups of young people were meeting with councillors, as part of the corporate parenting board. Young people led the feedback to central government on the 'Green Paper'. They shaped the complaint leaflet and the pre-review consultation documents.

The discussion with the lead officer on consultation gave evidence of the commitment and energy being channelled in continuing to make the service responsive and, as far as possible, shaped by children and young peoples' perspective. (This and the achievements so far, in an area that was already considered excellent at the previous inspection, is the reason for the score of 4 on consultation).

Since last inspection the authority had set up a consultation group for younger children aged 5 to 11, while also keeping the older children's group. The discussion with a child, representative of the younger children group, showed that she was satisfied with the project, felt that it was fun, a good way to meet others and make their views heard.

Work was being done on improving consultation and enabling full involvement of children with disabilities, including those with non-verbal communication.

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 area was good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Carers received regular payment of agreed allowances.

A review of payments and other components of the allowances is recommended to ensure that children placed with Lambeth carers are not disadvantaged by the rates not being competitive.

EVIDENCE:

From discussion with carers and staff it was understood that allowances and agreed expenses were paid on time. The fostering service had a written policy on fostering allowances; administrative systems facilitated prompt and accurate payment.

Allowances were reviewed annually. The service manager identified a need to rationalise the range of allowances paid to carers in the light of legal advice, feedback from Lambeth foster carers' association and the increasing number of carers making application for special guardianship.

Carers and staff pointed out, during the inspection, that both allowances and other components, such as holiday pay, retainers, etc. were not competitive. In fact the basic rate of pay was less than what the Fostering Network recommended. It was also understood that allowances to be increased was a request regularly made by carers at meetings and by the local foster carers' association. (See recommendation).

The recommendation is made because carers mainly relying on fostering allowances would have lower incomes than carers from other comparable authorities or from the independent sector. Opportunities for children placed with them might be affected. It might also mean that Lambeth would find it increasingly difficult to recruit or retain high calibre carers, able to meet the complex needs of the children, as the recruitment of carers' market is very competitive at present.

For example, it was understood that one carer had recently resigned to become a carer for a near-by authority. The only reason for the resignation was that the other authority's allowances were much better.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

2, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25

Quality in this area was good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

Children benefited from robust and inspired management that strived to improve outcomes. Carers benefited from good support.

Temporary arrangements needed to be stabilised. This would give the service a stronger chance to realistically progress the ambitious agenda started and to

ensure that staff would benefit from consistency in leadership and vision.

EVIDENCE:

Some evidence for the judgement above is already given in the report, in relation to management of the specific areas, the positive outcomes for children that had been achieved and the plans for development. Some additional points are made below.

There was a strong, well-qualified and experienced management team, at all levels. Managers provided good leadership and support to staff.

The service had been affected by the general London-wide difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified and experienced staff and a number of appointments both at social work and managerial level were temporary, although some had been in post for some time.

While there were sufficient staff in relation to the work undertaken, resources would be needed for new work planned and especially for the recruitment campaign of carers, which was to start in April 2007. (This is discussed above in the report).

Discussion with staff indicated that during the past year it had been difficult to properly follow up interest expressed by potential carers because of not enough staff to take on this work. In the last 2.5 years there had been 3 temporary recruitment officers. The current person in post was again a temporary appointment. The short term and assessment team had a proportion of 30% agency staff.

Additionally, of the 70% permanent staff, some came from a non-fostering background. Therefore, it was raised by staff, there was a need for much training, as well as for stability of staff, to address the recruitment project.

However management considered that the target was achievable and discussed the steps that were being put in place to make this realistic. Senior management said that emphasis had continued into recruitment and retention of staff. The assistant director was, in fact, consulting with other authorities to review which strategies had been most effective in comparable inner London services. It was too early to assess the likely effectiveness of the plans and whether the additional resources envisaged would be adequate. This would be followed up at a future inspection.

It was very positive, though, that the consensus of opinions amongst a range of stakeholders was that there had been great improvements in the last year or so in management, leadership, clarity of roles and training. This gave reassurance about the potential for success for the projects being started.

For example, stakeholders acknowledged that the divisional director had a clear vision and gave a strong lead on the ethos of the service. They said that the assistant director had been influential in starting the agenda of improvements, while the temporary service manager had been excellent at improving policies and procedures.

Supervising social workers felt supported by the team managers. They found supervision a helpful process in reviewing their work and planning development and training. For example they said:

"We can go to the team managers about issues, they listen and take them up"; or: "There is a culture of openness, managers listen and are approachable. Management is genuine".

Supervising social workers acknowledged the work of the business support team, which they said to be excellent.

Both supervising social workers and the business support team spoke with pride about the positive outcomes for children already achieved and the plans for continuing improvements.

One written communication was received, during the inspection, which expressed dissatisfaction with management. However as its origin could not be established, this could not be followed up with the person.

Staff and other stakeholders stressed that stability of management and staff would be necessary to have consistency in the agenda being driven and monitored. For example staff said:

"We need stability, so many changes, so much anxiety".

"There are a lot of initiatives and ideas. But we need some reassurance about the long-term. We need constancy of senior management that also would demonstrate to us the commitment of Lambeth to the future".

Staff also said that they would welcome more clarity on entitlement to training and career development for all staff, (including opportunities open to agency staff who might want to become permanent). This was related to management who said that they would follow this up at staff meetings.

There was a strategy for supporting and supervising carers. Carers seen praised the support received from their supervising social workers (SSWs) and from the professionals involved in mental / emotional health and education,

working jointly with fostering. Responses to questionnaires rated very highly the way the service enabled carers to support children.

For example carers said:

"The fostering service has given me very good support and training".

"I cannot think of anything the fostering service could do better".

"I am happy with the service being provided to me".

"Since becoming a foster carer for Lambeth the service I receive and the support from both parties has been very good".

"I am very happy that both the social worker and link worker are looking more in children's education, including their daily life and their future".

Suggestions made by carers to strengthen support were:

- That support groups should be run at times to suit all carers and should be geared also to addressing needs of carers with foster children with disabilities.
 - That training courses should be held at times convenient for carers working during the day.
 - That crèche facilities should be provided.
 - That turnover of staff should be remedied.
- (See recommendation).

The sample of carers and children looked at during this inspection had experienced consistency of SSWs and placing social workers in the last year or so. However some commented on the negative impact of the high turnover of staff in the past. One young person interviewed particularly spoke of the distress of having to explain to new people repeatedly past experiences. Carers said that they knew from colleagues that some were still experiencing high turnover of staff.

There was evidence from discussion with carers and staff and from the records looked at, that visits to the sample of carers tracked had been conducted at the intervals set by the authority. The supervising social workers made a record of the visits that was kept on file.

The records showed that the supervision sessions addressed relevant areas, but the records should clearly indicate whether the child was seen or not and comments / views expressed by the child. (See recommendation)

The authority might want to re-design the supervision templates to make them more targeted at showing how carers support children in relation to the 'every child matters' outcomes. The area on education should be addressed even in the case of babies, (whereas, on one file seen, it was referred to as not applicable). (See recommendation)

Individual case records for children were kept. These and other records were held securely and with due regard for confidentiality. Computers were

password protected. Entry to the building required individual electronic passes with identifying photograph.

The premises were offices equipped for the work of the fostering service and included suitable rooms that could be used for training and meeting purposes. Staff said that although the open plan environment had some advantages, there was lack of confidentiality as no provision had been made to have private discussions on the day to day. Staff also said that there were not enough desks and equipment to enable all staff who might come to the office to effectively get on with their tasks. (See recommendation).

The assessment, management and support of kinship carers were discussed with senior management. One kinship carer's file and the child's file were inspected and a telephone conversation held with the carer. Relevant findings have been incorporated in this report.

However the specific standard in this section has not been scored as the authority was in the process of regularising the situation regarding a number of historical kinship placements and also making different plans for their support once approved. This would be best followed up, therefore, at a future visit.

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	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
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	4
11	4

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	3
4	X
5	X
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	3
22	X
23	X
24	3
25	3
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	FS9	That child protection training and refreshers are provided on a rolling programme for staff and carers. That consideration is given to some joint training with placing social workers, to enhance consistency and understanding in responding to concerns, particularly those raised about carers living outside Lambeth.
2	FS6FS15	That, regarding suitability of carers and staff: - Carers are placed on the register only after the decision maker approves them. - Staff and panel members' CRBs are reviewed to ensure that they were conducted by Lambeth and, if not so, that they are renewed immediately.
3	FS29	That foster carers' allowances are re-examined with a view to increase them.

4	FS17 FS21	That consideration is given to the suggestions made by carers to strengthen support, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The times when support groups and training sessions are run - The support groups addressing issues relevant to carers with foster children with disabilities. - Provision of crèche facilities. - Reducing turnover of staff.
5	FS21	That regarding carers' supervision records: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is clearly indicated on the record whether the child was seen or not and the comments / views expressed by the child. - That the section on education is addressed whatever the age of the child. - That the authority considers making the templates more targeted at showing how carers are supporting children in relation to the 'every child matters' outcomes.
6	FS26	That consideration is given to the suggestions made by staff regarding premises, in particular about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision for confidential discussions. - Provision of satisfactory equipment and space to facilitate social workers' office based work.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

SE London Area Office

River House

1 Maidstone Road

Sidcup

Kent DA14 5RH

National Enquiry Line

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI