



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

London Borough of Ealing Adoption Service

**Town Hall Annexe
3rd Floor, New Broadway
Ealing
London
W5 2BY**

Lead Inspector
Lynn Smith

Announced Inspection
1st November 2005 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Adoption*. 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 Ealing Adoption Service
Address	Town Hall Annexe 3rd Floor, New Broadway Ealing London W5 2BY
Telephone number	0208 825 8815
Fax number	0208 825 8226
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	London Borough of Ealing
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Ghazala Sheikh
Type of registration	Local Auth Adoption 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 This is the first inspection under the terms of the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003.

Brief Description of the Service:

Ealing adoption service is part of the placements department within social service. The placements services are the responsibility of the operations manager. This service comprises of four teams,

- Recruitment team (fostering and adoption)
- Access to Resources Team
- Fostering Support Team
- Adoption & Permanency Team (including the adoption support team)

Each team has a manager.

The adoption and permanency team comprises of the manager, a deputy, a senior social worker, four social workers and an assistant. The adoption support team consists of a senior social worker, a social worker and an assistant. There is an administration team that supports the service. The Recruitment team recruit foster carers and adopters.

Ealing provides a comprehensive adoption service. This includes:

- The placement of looked after children with adoptive families.
- The recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adoptive families.
- Adoption support, including letterbox contact and birth records counselling.
- Assessment and approval of applicants wishing to adopt from overseas.

SUMMARY

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

This was the first inspection of the London Borough of Ealing's adoption service. One fostering inspector and two adoption inspectors inspected Ealing's adoption and fostering services. Joint interviews were undertaken wherever possible as well as premises and personnel files. All inspectors participated in the joint feedback to adoption and fostering management teams at the end of the adoption fieldwork.

Prior to the inspection fieldwork, a number of supporting documents were supplied to and read by the inspector. Questionnaires were received from 6 approved adopters, 4 placing social workers, 1 placing authority and 3 specialist advisors.

Two inspectors from the adoption team carried out the adoption inspection fieldwork over a period of 4 days.

The adoption panel was observed and the panel chair interviewed.

Interviews were also held with:

- A birth mother
- Post adoption support workers
- Administration staff
- Panel administrators
- Fostering and adoption social workers
- Placing social workers
- Psychologist
- Looked after children's teacher
- Substance misuse worker
- Family Solutions worker
- 'Drop in' worker
- Agency decision maker
- Elected member
- Manager

Four adoptive families were selected to be case tracked and this involved visiting and reading relevant adopters and children's files.

Other documents, which included personnel files, panel members files, adopters and children's case files were read during the fieldwork and the premises and archives were inspected.

The inspectors would like to thank the managers and staff for their cooperation during the inspection. Inspectors were made welcome and given access to everything they required.

All staff interviewed were honest and open, enabling the inspection to be carried out efficiently and effectively.

What the service does well:

The service is good at recruiting adopters and placing children with adoptive families. The service goes to great lengths to ensure sufficient adopters from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds are available to meet the needs of children in Ealing awaiting adoptive placements. One placing social worker said, "The adoption agency staff are well fore-sighted and meticulous while matching children".

Prospective adopters assessments are of a good standard, analytical and address the competencies of the prospective adopters. Outcomes from the preparation training are documented well in the assessment with overseas applicants attending specific overseas adoption training.

Approved adopters receive a very useful 'adopters handbook' which covers issues like,

- Support
- Matching
- Planning meetings
- Life story work (the importance of the child's heritage)
- Later life letter
- Family book for children
- Contact
- Order/court
- Complaints

Adopters have access to continual learning via support groups and seminars. Adopters are able to discuss specific issues with specialist, for example,

- Looked after children's psychologist
- Looked after children's nurse
- Medical advisor
- Education liaison and support officer

The dedicated adoption team member manages all face-to-face contact and the letterbox contact, this enables adopters and birth family members to know who to contact regarding issues. One birth mother spoke very highly of the service and explained how supported she found the adoption support workers.

It is very good practice that all adopters are invited to attend panel whether it is for approval or matching. Foster carer looking after the children in question are requested to attend panel as well to give their views on the child and the match.

Adopters said the first contact with Ealing adoption service was very positive. They felt welcomed and were given relevant and useful information.

The adoption staff team is a stable, knowledgeable and experienced team. All felt the training; supervision was to a high standard, which is echoed in 75% of the team achieving PQ1.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection under the terms of the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003.

What they could do better:

The staff recruitment policy now needs to identify that all references will be followed up with a telephone call in the future.

The supervising Managers do regular supervision with all permanent staff members, however, they need to ensure independent social workers are also suitably supervised and records are made.

Some staff have up to date child protection training but this must be given to all staff members and a record made.

Panel members need to be aware of both fostering and adoption regulations as they do on occasions recommend long term fostering as part of their role on the adoption and permanency panel. This training along with induction, appraisals, panel observation and other training should be recorded.

The adoption panel chair needs to be mindful and ensure the views of all members are heard and recorded especially the recommendations and the reasons for it.

Although the recording in case files is generally of a good standard, some files inspected had information mis-filed and a more stringent file audit system is recommended. Case decisions by supervisors also need to be on case files.

A consistent approach to gathering information about children from birth family members needs to be developed to enable all children to have a sense of past family events and the views of birth parents about their adoption.

Although the adoption service is within a local authority building, the entrance is not clearly identifiable as offering a service to people that have been touched by adoption or wishing to adopt.

The working conditions for staff within the building were cramped, hot with a lack of ventilation and very noisy.

File archiving and storage would benefit from a risk assessment to minimise risk and ensure security.

A disaster and recovery plan needs to be in place for the adoption service.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- Adopters are given information about matching (NMS 5)
- The functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10)
- The constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11)
- Adoption panels are timely (NMS 12)
- Adoption agency decision is made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13)
- The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15)
- Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19)
- The agency has a robust complaints procedure (NMS 24 Voluntary Adoption Agency only)

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

2,4,5,10,11,12,13,15 & 19

Ealing adoption service has appropriate practices in relation to the appointment of suitable staff, the assessment of prospective adopters and matching which ensures children are placed safely with adoptive families.

EVIDENCE:

Ealing's Children and Families Service has good written plans to address the recruitment of foster carers and adopters for the children of Ealing needing these placements.

Files document well the family finding process that takes place.

Ealing adoption service has approached Embassies to find groups that reflect the ethnical and cultural needs of the children waiting for adoption. Recruitment drives at strategic places and advertising in relevant magazines and papers has found many suitable families for the children waiting for adoption placements.

Children are placed with suitable families however if the child's ethnic origin, cultural or religion is not fully reflected in the placement match, policies and procedures are in place for social worker staff and staff to follow which

highlight where other services could be used to ensure the child's needs are met.

Matching reports, placement planning meetings and support plans are constructively used to facilitate positive matches between children and prospective adopters.

Prospective adopters and adopters' assessments inspected were analytical and addressed competencies well, overall a good standard.

A statutory/ character verification sheet evidenced all checks and references with their outcomes and dates. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are requested on all adults in the household and any other people likely to have sole charge of the child. There is also a good health and safety check completed which take into account pets, cars and dangerous weapons.

A midway review or second opinion could be of benefit to social workers to ensure all aspects of the assessment have been addressed at an early stage.

Ealing adoption service need to ensure all independent social workers are closely supervised to ensure all aspects of assessments are covered and the social workers are up to date with the policies and procedures of the service.

The adopters' spoke highly of the preparation training, " the social workers running the sessions and the invited speakers were excellent". One-second time adopter said, " Although the sessions and participants were positive, I would have found it more useful if specific second time adopter sessions were held".

Ealing adoption service subscribes to the 'Overseas Adoption Service' who run specific preparation groups for prospective adopters intending to adopt from overseas. The consortium Ealing adoption service belongs to have recruited two workers who run two preparation groups for overseas adopters per year for members of the consortium.

Once adopters have been approved, they are given a copy of the 'adopters handbook' this gives a full range of information to approved adopters. In addition a newsletter keeps families informed of services. The adoption support team organise social events to facilitate adopters meeting each other and seminars four times a year as part of continual learning.

Not all adopters who responded felt regular contact was maintained once they were approved. One said, " The only contact we have is when we phone them".

One couple felt very isolated whilst matches were considered. Social workers could work more proactively to support adopters through this stressful period.

The adoption panel is appropriately constituted with a mix of professionals and lay people with personal experience of adoption. Good policies and procedures are in place, however as this panel may on occasions look at permanency through fostering, it must reflect the Fostering Services Regulations and ensure quoracy. Panel members must be made aware of fostering and adoption issues.

Prospective adopters are invited to attend panel. Also during matches, foster carers and the approved adopters are invited.

New panel members have an induction and all panel members have the opportunity to receive regular training. It is suggested that this be recorded on their files as evidence that it has been undertaken. All panel members have signed confidentiality agreements and have protocols governing their role.

It was evident during the observation of the adoption panel that the panel chair is very knowledgeable and child-focused, always considering what is in the best interests of the children. Care needs to be taken to ensure all panel members are listened to and their views taken into account. The assumption that all panel members are agreeing with the chair should not be made. Reasons why recommendations are made should be discussed with all panel members and recorded accordingly on panel minutes.

The minutes reflect the discussion but do not give reasons for the recommendation. The separate minutes on case files do not state the membership of the adoption panel.

Adopters said that they received a letter from the Decision Maker very quickly after the adoption panel.

There had been no disruptions in the last 12 months but the procedures ensure a meeting is held and issues reported to the adoption panel as a learning mechanism.

The evidence in the nominated manager's personnel file indicates that she is suitable and safe to manage the adoption service. The personnel file did not evidence that telephone references had been done, however it was several years since the managers appointment. The procedures need to be clarified in relation to the taking up of telephone references in every case for adoption workers.

The adoption staff team have relevant checks in place. Social workers said they are able to access regular training to enhance their knowledge in adoption and childcare.

Child protection training is available however, not all adoption workers have had up to date training.

Unqualified staff are supported and supervised by experienced social workers.

Ealing adoption service has very experienced and knowledgeable managers they are accessible, build the knowledge base of the team and manage the team in such a way that all members feel valued. The stability of the team enables the group to build a sound knowledge base of adoption.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)

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

6 & 18

The adoption support given by Ealing adoption service is focussed and committed to the needs of children and their adoptive families.

EVIDENCE:

Ealing adoption service has clear policies and procedures for supporting prospective adopters and adopters.

Adopters spoke positively about the preparation training, one said, “we enjoyed the preparation sessions much more than we thought we would”.

Social workers felt the continuity of the stable staff team gave prospective adopters and adopters’ confidence that they could contact anyone within the team for support.

A post adoption newsletter is produced every six months and gives information about different seminars and activities adopters and prospective adopters can attend, for example,

- Attachment
- Parenting
- Life story
- Groups and picnics
-

Training is also available via the consortium Ealing belong to.

Each approved adopter receives an ‘Adopters Handbook’. This was a very good reference point explaining issues like:

- Support
- Matching

- Planning meetings
- Life story work (the importance of the child's heritage)
- Later life letter
- Family book for children
- Contact
- Order/Court
- Complaints

Adopters spoken to said they felt they could go to the adoption support team for advice and support if required. All were very much aware of the need to promote their children's identity and keep safe memorabilia for the child to reflect on later as their understanding grows.

Ealing provide specialist services to support adopters and children, for example, a child psychologist and an education liaison and support officer. The post adoption centre is also available for counselling, specialist services and training as well as a 'drop in' surgery monthly.

The social work staff spoke highly about the advisors to panel, medical and legal advisor. One placing social worker said, "The adoption team and the legal advisor were one of our main sources of information and support when making adoption placements.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- The Adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)

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

7,8 & 9

The service has systems in place and a clear commitment to birth parents and the lifelong implication of adoption, however this is not consistently achieved for all.

EVIDENCE:

The service to birth parents is a growing and developing area of work in the adoption team. An independent counselling service, the 'post adoption centre' began in March 2005. Birth parents are able to receive a service from the post adoption centre, adoption support and the placing social workers.

The adoption support team work constructively to build relationships with birth parents via the letterbox contact system, when contact is due or mail arrives for a birth parent, the adoption support team will write to inform them. The adoption support worker also offer help with letter writing and encourages birth parents to maintain contact with their birth children. Consistent contact gives children a sense of belonging.

All face to face contact and letterbox contact is managed by dedicated adoption team members. This has enabled successful contacts to be maintained over several years. The team also manage a very thorough recording system.

An intermediary service is available to birth relatives wishing to trace adopted adults.

There are clear strategies to continue the positive work that the adoption team have built up with birth parents.

During the interview with placing social workers it was clear that they were aware of the importance of birth family members views and the need to gather information for each child. However they did feel family members were not always forthcoming with information. Not all permanence reports clearly indicated the parent's views with a signature clarifying they agree with the written text.

Information for children about their birth families was gathered by placing social workers however this was not always consistent.

To ensure children have sufficient birth family history to enable children to understand their life, as they get older a more rigorous approach needs to be taken.

Regular training and work packs are available to support social workers doing life story work.

Management

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- The agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
- The manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
- The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
- The agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
- The staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
- The agency has sufficient staff with the right skills / experience (NMS 21)
- The agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
- The agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
- Case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
- The agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
- The agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
- The agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
- The adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30, Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)

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

1,3,14,16,17,20,21,22,23,25,26,27,28 & 29

The agency is well managed at all levels and this ensures consistency of practice and good outcomes for children.

EVIDENCE:

Ealing's statement of purpose on adoption services is informative and clearly a working document. The executive approved it in September 2005.

Some issues need to be considered when it is next reviewed, for example, at present it refers the reader to the fostering statement of purpose regarding one of the support teams, it could contain this information. The Independent Reviewing Mechanism should be included as well as the service offered to step parents regarding adoption. It needs to be clear that the adoption service has a nominated manager and not a registered manager.

The children's guide used by Ealing is currently the British Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) guide. This guide is generic and does not give details of Ealing's services. Ealing is writing its own children's guide that is due to be circulated January 2006.

Adopters say that Ealing adoption service has welcomed them without prejudice. They feel they have been treated fairly and with respect.

The information pack that is sent to all enquiring about adoption contains a summary of the statement of purpose. Information about the type of children waiting is also included.

Systems are in place to prioritise prospective adopters that maybe able to meet the needs of Ealing children waiting for adoptive placements.

Information evenings and preparation groups are held regularly. After each group the preparation course is reviewed. All participants fill in feedback sheets and the outcome assessed by the course facilitator. Good outcomes and evidence of the prospective adopters participation in the preparation group is evidenced in their assessments.

The managers of the adoption team are skilled, experienced and knowledgeable. The levels of communication are good, staff feel involved and informed and lines of accountability and delegation of responsibility are clearly defined.

Ealing has very good monitoring systems to ensure children in Ealing do not face unnecessary delays. The management team and the adoption panel regularly review numbers of children waiting for permanent placements and timescales for matching and placement dates. Quarterly and annual reports are prepared. The Leader of the Council was very aware and received regular information about the fostering and adoption service.

Staff interviewed reported that they receive regular and worthwhile supervision. Support workers were supported to undertake DipSW qualifications. Staff spoke positively about training they said it was accessible with internal and external courses available. 75% of the staff team have achieved PQ1.

The adoption team was fully staffed, however there was one vacancy in the support team. Staff were positive about working for the London Borough of

Ealing and felt they were treated fairly. They gave examples of the flexibility and competitive rates for pay and conditions.

Staff felt very supported by the administration team who also felt they have sufficient resources.

The service has procedures in place for case recording, the maintenance of confidentiality and access to records. Case files inspected were generally well structured, with case notes typed, signed and dated by the workers. However there was little evidence of decisions taken in supervision being recorded on case files. Although there is a managerial audit system, this needs to be developed on a more frequent basis as some of the files inspected had information missing or duplicated.

Children's adoption files were also in need of regular auditing as gaps in case recording, lack of supervisory decisions and missing information were evident in a number.

Staff personnel files were of a good standard with signed receipts to evidence all staff members had copies of policies and annual appraisals.

Ealing has an electronic database for CRB checks to ensure all staff have one and renewal dates are not missed.

The adoption service is not clearly sign posted at the entrance to the building. The working conditions for staff are cramped, hot with lack of ventilation and very noisy.

No risk assessment was in place for the file storage and a disaster, recovery plan needs to be in place for the adoption service.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 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	
Standard No	Score
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
Standard No	Score
7	3
8	3
9	3

STAYING SAFE	
Standard No	Score
2	3
4	3
5	3
10	2
11	3
12	2
13	3
15	3
19	4
24	N/A

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
Standard No	Score
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
Standard No	Score
6	3
18	4

MANAGEMENT	
Standard No	Score
1	2
3	3
14	3
16	3
17	3
20	3
21	3
22	3
23	3
25	2
26	3
27	3
28	3
29	2
30	N/A
31	N/A

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, Voluntary Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2003 or Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	AD1	3	The adoption service must produce a written children's guide, which is age appropriate and includes all matters listed in schedule 2	02/04/06
2	AD20	10	All staff must be up to date on child protection training	01/09/06
3	AD12	AAR1983	Reasons for recommendations must be discussed with panel members and recorded on panel minutes.	08/02/06
4	AD29	16	The agency must ensure there is adequate security for the storage of files on and of the premises.	08/02/06

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	AD11	The agency should ensure that the induction and training undertaken by panel members is recorded on their files.

2	AD19	The recruitment and selection procedures should be clarified in relation to telephone enquires to verify referees.
3	AD7	The agency should ensure that birth parents see the information presented to panel and that evidence of this is available either by their signature or an explanation given of why this could not be obtained.
4	AD25	Decisions by supervisors should be recorded on case files.
5	AD20	Independent social workers supervision must be recorded.
6	AD27	The system for file audits should be improved to ensure information is filed on the correct file and that the contents comply with regulations.
7	AD8	A more rigorous approach must be undertaken to ensure children have sufficient birth family history.
8	AD29	The adoption premises should be clearly identifiable.
9	AD29	The adoption service should ensure they have a suitable disaster, recovery plan covering both provision of premises and the safeguard/back up of records.

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