



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

**London Borough of Brent Childrens Services
Placement**

**Triangle House
328-330 High Road
Wembley
Middx
HA9 6AZ**

Lead Inspector
Bernard Burrell

Announced Inspection
13th February 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service London Borough of Brent Childrens Services Placement

Address Triangle House
328-330 High Road
Wembley
Middx
HA9 6AZ

Telephone number 020 8937 4558

Fax number 020 8937 4520

Email address

Provider Web address

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

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Ms Jan Fishwick

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 22nd March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Fostering Service is part of Brent Children and Families Service within the Social Services Business Group. The service consists of three teams, the Intake and Referral, Fostering Assessment and the Long-Term Fostering. Three different managers with a complement of social work, support and administrative staff manage the service from its premises in Wembley High Road, North West London.

According to the Fostering Service's Statement of Purpose, the service aims to provide safe and appropriate placements for children who are looked after by Brent. It also aims to find alternative homes within a child's extended family or with any member of their community with whom they have a special relationship.

The service also aims to work in partnership with prospective carers, children and their families, colleagues, and other professionals and agencies. It also aims to promote and develop high standards in the placement of children and avoiding all unnecessary placement moves.

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose also stated the service aims to value a child's cultural, ethnic and religious and linguistic background. In addition, it aims to prioritise recruiting and assessing of foster carers who are most likely to meet the needs of local children who need families.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place from the 13-17 February 2006 and involved contributions and input from staff in the fostering service, foster carers and many of the looked after children and young people. The inspectors also read and examined a number of case files for the staff, the looked after children, foster carers, plus policy and procedure documents.

The inspection findings indicated that the fostering service continues to make commendable efforts to recruit more foster carers, improve its communication with and support to foster carers, provide a range of opportunities to help improve the educational outcomes for children and recruit additional social work staff.

The findings also indicated the fostering service is continuing to reorganise and develop its organisational structure, including plans to improve the environmental condition of its place of business.

The inspectors would like to thank everyone for their time and contributions to this inspection process.

What the service does well:

The inspection findings indicated that the fostering service is working collaboratively with the education department and other stakeholders to help ensure the educational outcomes for the looked after children and young people are improved beyond the minimum standards. This has resulted in an increasing number of young people having their pathway and Personal Education Plans (PEPs) prepared, plus improvements in the GCSE and other examination passes.

There is also good practice of staff supervision and support, including access and availability to a range of learning and development opportunities.

The service continues to develop a range of relevant and targeted training programmes for its foster carers. It has continued to be proactive in its recruitment of potential foster carers in its locality and recently employed a recruitment consultant to help in this objective.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Improvements have been made to help ensure the service has more staff to carry out its stated aims and objectives of the service.

The supervising social workers are now making more regular contact with the foster carers.

Measurable efforts have been made to recruit more potential foster carers from the local borough.

Continued effort is being made to help ensure that placements matching are more suitable and stable for the children and young people.

What they could do better:

The fostering service will need to ensure that greater emphasis is placed on ensuring that the Five Outcomes for every child and young person in its care are achieved in the same way it focuses efforts on improving its systems, policy and procedures. The fostering service should also ensure that each foster carer is kept up to date and understands the objectives of the Five Outcomes for every child and young person being looked after.

The service must ensure that a more robust and comprehensive monitoring of each placement is carried out for every child and young person in its care to help ensure that their safety, welfare and wellbeing is protected at all times.

The service must ensure that it works more collaboratively with all foster carers and make better attempts to resolve any outstanding disputes/issues with foster carers.

The fostering service should ensure that each foster carer fully understands the borough's diversity policy and procedures. The service should also ensure that the diversity needs of every child and young person placed with a foster carer can be and is been adequately met.

The fostering service must ensure that matching consideration for every child and young person is made in their best interest and where possible, their views about the placements under consideration are taken into account before placements are made.

The fostering service must ensure that copies of all required information, including health records of every child and young person is available in the case files and records held in the fostering service. The service must also ensure that relevant information relating to each child and young person is shared with the foster carers where appropriate.

The fostering service must ensure that the Brent Foster Carers Handbook includes information and guidelines to foster carers on how best to manage and administer medication for the children and young people being looked after.

The fostering service should ensure the service is adequately staffed to help carry out the backlog of foster carers reviews and the processing of assessments to help prevent backlog building up.

The fostering service should ensure that every effort is made to get all foster carers to attend relevant training such as First Aid.

The fostering service should ensure that all foster carers are reminded about the importance of ensuring that individual recordings must be made for each child in placement, irrespective of situations where placements are sibling groups.

The fostering service must ensure that the planned improvements to the internal physical environmental condition of the building used by the service are carried out to help ensure it becomes more user friendly for staff and the public. Effort must be made to ensure that the public facilities on the ground floor are maintained in a more hygienic condition.

The fostering service must ensure the CSCI is kept informed and updated about any child protection investigation or other significant incidents affecting the welfare and safety of the looked after children and young people.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

There were health policy and procedures in place but these were not specific to the fostering service. A number of the case files did not contain health plans or records of immunisation for the children and young people being cared for. A few of the medical checks for foster carers were out of date and there was insufficient evidence to verify that a systematic and a consistent approach is being followed relating to annual health checks for the looked after children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service provided the inspectors with a document entitled 'Health Care for Looked After Children and Young People (LAC),' issued October 2005. The information described the arrangements to be made for a Looked After child's health care and listed the people who are responsible, information about relevant forms and other procedures.

According to the document, the LAC Health Team based at another location from the fostering service, deals with the requests for health assessments for LAC. The procedure states that initial health assessments (IHA) should be carried out within two weeks of the child becoming Looked After.

The foster carers handbook also makes reference to 'medicals and medical treatment.' However, the handbook had no guidelines of how foster carers should manage medication in the home. The guide stated that 'in an emergency foster carers should not delay in getting medical help for any child placed.' In addition, there were no guidelines in the Foster Carer's Handbook relating to what carers should do to help promote the health and wellbeing of looked after children and young people. The Fostering Service should consider addressing this.

Several of the Looked after children and young people files examined by the inspectors had no information about health checks or records of immunisation

for example. There was also no evidence of health records on the case files examined by the inspectors in the fostering service. The Service Manager informed the inspectors that health records are held on the children's file in the Children Social Work Team.

In addition, the annual medical checks for a few foster carers were out of date. In one case for example, a foster carer was diagnosed with medical condition but there was no evidence of a health check review being carried out. There was also no evidence to indicate a risk assessment had been carried out or how long this carer would be able to continue caring for the current looked after child.

However, the inspectors were satisfied that the foster carers who met and communicated with the inspectors provided satisfactory examples and evidence of the actions they have taken to deal with health related issues affecting the looked after children and young people in their care.

The inspectors noted from the information received from three carers that the mental health of at least one looked after child and two young persons remained problematic. The carers stated they have been proactive and taken initiative to seek appropriate therapeutic help for the looked after child and one young person concerned. The carers reported that they did not feel fully supported by the fostering service in this area, and that there was a lack of uniform approach and agreement between them and the fostering service to address these issues.

The above appears to be contrary to the information supplied by the fostering service on the pre-inspection questionnaire which stated that 'the child's health is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis by the foster carer through supervisory visits and the child's statutory reviews and annual foster carer's reviews.'

One foster carer stated that the fostering service is 'quick to respond to difficult situations as they arise, and that they are always ready to and willing to listen to any problems.' However, the carer felt 'there is a lack of facilities for children who have specialist needs such as drug rehabilitation or mental health issues.'

The inspectors noted from information supplied by the fostering service that it offers a range of support and access to therapeutic services, substance misuse training for foster carers plus drug awareness printed information for people living in the borough. The fostering service should continue to ensure that its work in this area is reviewed to help identify needs that exist.

The reports and feedback received from various children and young people included the following comments: 'my foster carer everyday gives me lecture

on how to eat healthy food like steam cook food and vegetables without lots of oil,' 'they make sure I don't eat too much things with sugar and they feed me a balanced diet.' 'My foster carers watch me regularly and feed me fruits and vegetables.'

The findings indicated the fostering service has the appropriate tools and systems in place necessary to monitor the health of very child and young person in placement. However, there is need for more robust monitoring in this area by all the supervising social workers. The service must ensure that it has and keeps up to date copies of all health records for the looked after children, young people and foster carers for the next inspection.

The inspectors noted from two foster carers case files examined, plus discussions with two foster carers that longstanding issues with the fostering service are still unresolved. One carer stated this was causing unnecessary stress and another stated they were 'marginalised.' The fostering service must ensure that every effort is made to cultivate better collaborative working relationships with all its foster carers in matters relating to the health, welfare and wellbeing of the looked after children and young people.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3,6,8,9,15

The fostering service employs people with the appropriate and relevant professional qualification and experience to work in and for the service. Appropriate checks of prospective foster carers are carried out by the fostering service. More work is needed to ensure all placements are better monitored to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors examined a number of staffing files and had discussions with several key staff and managers working in the fostering service. The findings indicated that all staff had appropriate qualifications and relevant experience. The inspectors were satisfied that relevant checks and references are taken up for each staff member. The evidence examined also indicated that staff receive regular planned supervision, annual appraisal and opportunities for professional training and development.

The inspectors were informed about a recent foster carers recruitment campaign carried out by the fostering service entitled 'The Rewards of Fostering.' The service contracted the expertise of a recruitment specialist to coordinate the campaign.

The fostering service also recruits foster carers through recommendations from existing carers. According to the service manager, the campaign generated many responses from the public. These were being screened at the time of this

inspection to decide the suitability of the applicants. A new fostering booklet has also been printed and will reportedly be sent to all prospective foster care applicants who have expressed interest in fostering. The service manager also informed the inspectors that the service is now in the process of planning the Preparation Group that will provide induction and information to the prospective carers as part of the assessment process.

The findings indicated that some carers did not sign the completed Form F assessments. There was also no evidence on the files examined to verify that the competency section of the Form Fs was completed in line with the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) guidelines.

In a few of the foster carers files examined, the inspectors noted that CRB and health checks were not carried out on time. The inspectors noted that reminders were recently sent to several carers and also discussed in their supervising home visits.

One foster carer informed the inspectors of their concern when an estranged partner who was a carer invited a male companion to live at the foster care home but failed to notify the fostering service about this.

The carer also expressed concern about the fitness of a respite carer who was caring for a looked after young person. A relative reportedly notified the fostering service of their concerns about this carer.

In another case, the inspectors noted that a child protection investigation was still ongoing relating to a foster carer looking after a vulnerable child who had 5 placement moves in the last year. Documented evidence from the Best Interest Review showed that a recommendation was made by the social worker that the child should not remain with the carer long term.

The service manager told the inspectors that the Child Protection Records office held some of the documents relating to the investigation of this case. The inspectors requested to have access to all the documents relating to the case in order to carry out a full audit trail. However, the request was unsuccessful. The service manager stated that she had no access to the Child Protection Records for the purpose of this inspection.

CSCI was not notified by the fostering service of any child protection cases or other significant events affecting any of the looked after children/young people. However, the inspectors noted that strategies and action plans were carried out on time in most cases by the fostering service to protect the welfare and safety of the looked after children and young people.

The inspectors noted from the information provided by the fostering service that it provides Out of Hours Telephone support to foster carers plus the

services of the Emergency Duty Team (EDT). There is also clear guidance to foster carers about overnight stays for looked after children.

However, the fostering service should ensure that closer monitoring is carried out for every child and young person in placement. Concise and updated information and records pertaining to child protection issues must be on both the foster carers and looked after children/young person's files in the fostering service. The service must also ensure that the CSCI is kept informed of all child protection and safety issues in line with the regulated requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The fostering service should ensure that the foster carers handbook includes clearer explanation and more information about child protection issues in line with the local authority policy and procedure of the fostering service.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13

There was lack of information to indicate that foster carers will be supported to attend the training offered in cultural diversity to help carers promote and value the diversity needs of all looked after children in trans-cultural placements.

The fostering service takes the educational needs of children seriously. There was evidence to indicate that a consistent effort is being made to help promote the educational needs of looked after children/young people in the borough.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors were provided with the Brent Foster Carers Training Portfolio for 2005-6. No training on valuing and promoting diversity was included in the programme. However, training in this area is planned for September 2006. The inspector's observation from two home visits indicated that the foster carers did not have sound understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the looked after child and young people in placement. In one example, the Panel made a recommendation that training in 'race awareness' must be provided before a prospective foster carer was given any placement.

The inspectors noted that some effort has being made by the fostering service to place looked after children, particularly unaccompanied children in a home environment that closely matches their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, continued effort should be made to help ensure that all matching placements take into account the ability of each foster carer to meet the diversity needs of the children and young people in their care.

The inspections findings indicated that there continues to be good coordinating efforts being made by the various professionals and agencies in the borough to help promote the educational needs and achievements of the looked after children/young people.

The inspectors had discussions with staff from the Education Team for Looked After Children. The reports and updates received indicated the team work closely with local schools, foster carers, birth parents and other stakeholders to help ensure that the educational needs of the looked after children/young people are addressed.

The education coordinator and manager of the team reported that improvements have been made in the staffing of the team since the last inspection. This has resulted in the team being able to achieve many of the planned objectives to develop and respond to the educational needs of the looked after children and young people. One of the team's main intervention roles is to prevent permanent fixed-term exclusions of looked after children and young people. The team also responds to referrals received from foster carers, designated teachers in local schools and social workers.

The team offers an anger management programme and carries out Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) assessment together with other professionals to help produced action plans. Training in Personal Education Plans (PEPS) is also offered to designated teachers and social workers. After school 'booster classes' are offered in English and Maths to looked after children and young people with transportation provided for the younger children to return home.

The team also provides Easter and summer holiday programmes. The inspectors were informed that the service runs an annual celebration of achievement awards ceremony. This has resulted in about 50% of the looked after children and young people nominated each year for the awards. This scheme also includes children with a disability.

The education team has developed a 'Shared Programme' to help empower foster carers with the skills to support the educational needs of children/young people being cared for. Several foster carers gave examples to the inspectors about what they are doing to help the looked after children/young people with their scholastic work. The inspectors also received feedback from several children who gave examples of how their foster carers are helping them with their education and schoolwork. 'They help me understand my work if I don't get it and they test me on my work I just learned,' said one young person. Another reported that 'If I need help my carers help me with my homework and I go to after school maths club,' and one other young person stated 'I get help from my foster carer aunt with my homework and I always get good results.'

The managers of the education team gave updates on the number of children/young people who are receiving Statement of Special Education Needs (SEN). The reports indicated that the service is now making fewer referrals in this area of children age 6 to 7 years old. The findings indicated the team is being proactive and taking preventative measures before a child is excluded.

The inspectors were provided with a range of statistical information about the educational achievements of many of the looked after children and young people. The data indicated that 46 Looked after Children are in the Year 11 cohort. This included 26 children who took the GCSE examination. The results showed that:

- 5 achieved A-C grades passes
- 1 child received 10 A-C passes,
- 16 children achieved 5 or more A- G passes,
- 15 Children achieved at least 1 A-C pass and 25 children achieved at least 1 A-G passes.

Of the 20 Children who did not attend a mainstream school, the data showed that 6 had SEN with a significant diagnosis and attending special schools. In addition, 4 children had statements of SEN and were placed in alternative educational provision. This included children who are asylum seekers and had English as another language. In addition, good effort is being made to find suitable local school placements for a number of children and young people who are asylum seekers.

The data showed one child attended school in Ireland and took an alternative exam. Three children attended alternative educational provision in Brent. The fostering service is also providing training to foster carers to help raise the educational attainment of looked after children and young people in the borough. The managers stated that the service is also providing IT equipment to help support the learning needs of the children and young people.

The findings indicated more work and coordination is still needed to help ensure the improvements made are built on, including ensuring that preparation of the (PEPs) for children and young people are completed on time by all the professionals involved.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10,11

Good effort continues to be made to help the looked after children cultivate and maintain contacts with their families and other significant others. The fostering service continues to make attempts to support foster carers, but some carers reported the support is less than satisfactory. More work is needed to support the foster carers develop an autonomous association. More work is also needed to help ensure more foster carers are able to and do take up of the training opportunities available.

EVIDENCE:

There were clear guidelines in the Supervisory Support Records indicating that the supervising social workers are required to complete all sections with the foster carers and record updates about the contacts made between the looked after children and their families.

The Foster Carers Guide had only a brief mention about contact arrangements. This should be expanded further giving examples of what the fostering service expects foster carers to do before, during and after contact sessions. For example, foster carers should be reminded to document the emotional state of the child before, during and after contact.

The inspector's discussions with foster carers plus written evidence received from several others, indicated good attempts are being made to help promote contacts between the looked after children/young people and their families. One carer informed the inspectors that the two children in her care have contacts with their mum twice each year. 'I have to drop the girls at the council office and pick them up later,' she stated. Another carer stated: 'the child in my care says that he likes to keep his two families separate, however I

try to talk positively about the child's birth family. He has come from them and needs to feel positive about himself.'

Another carer stated that, "this job of contact is always maintained by social workers. They organised people who pick up the children on time and return them back to me." One carer adds: "we go out of our way to make sure that the children in our care see their family."

Discussions with foster carers and staff indicated that staff in the fostering service facilitate the Foster Carer's Association. One carer stated she would like to see this role taken over by the foster carers but with continued assistance from the social workers. The service should consider developing this area of the fostering service and help ensure that it becomes an autonomous and more effective association. The inspectors were also informed that the fostering service has plans to develop a support group for baby carers during the day with crèche facilities.

The service manager provided the inspectors with written evidence of how the fostering service listens to the children and young people. For example, through consultation documents, LAC reviews, supervised visits and through words and pictures expressed by the children and young people when permanency matching is being considered. According to the service manager, changes that have been made as a result of the service professionals listening to the looked after children included: level of pocket money and frequency given, reduction in placement moves, refusal of statutory medical checks, preferences and wishes in religious practices and issues registered in disruption meetings. The inspectors were not able to verify the above due to time constraints.

The inspectors sought the views of children and young people about whether they felt listened to by professionals in the service and if they felt their views were being dealt with. The majority of the respondents stated that foster carers rarely or never asked their opinions about their placements. One young person reported that he was asked about 'what he wanted to do when he grows up and what is his favourite sport.' Another stated that she did not 'want to meet her dad every Saturday so it was changed to every month.'

The feedback from the children and young people regarding their social workers, were more positive. The majority of the children and young people who responded, reported that they were asked for their opinions and were often seen on their own when the social workers visited the foster care homes.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

14,29

Good effort is being made to help young people manage the transition from foster care to independent and adult living.

The inspectors were unable to verify if all carers' payments and allowances are paid by the fostering service as agreed.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors met with the manager of the Leaving Care Team who gave detailed information about the service and the work been carried out with the young people who are planning to move to independent and adult living. In addition, the inspectors examined the Pathway Plans for several young people. The plans were completed with input from the supervising social workers, foster carers and the young people concerned.

The Leaving Care Team (LCT) is a multi-disciplinary service that includes housing support, drug and alcohol services, looked after children's nurse, health advice service and Connexions- the training and careers service. The LCT also has a Pathway Plan Coordinator, education and employment worker and two staff who work with the young people to prepare them for moving from foster care to semi-independent, independent and adult living. Training is also provided to foster carers relating to the Pathway Plans.

The LCT also delivers the Leaving Care Act as a training module to social workers. According to the manager, there has been an 'increase in the number of young people who have gone into employment training and education.'

The inspectors met with two young people who are in the process of preparing to move from foster care to independent living. Both young people spoke positively of the support they are receiving from their social workers and the

LCT. The young people confirmed that they are encouraged to save money from their allowances and develop essential life skills such as budgeting. Some carers reported they actively save money on behalf of the looked after children and young people. One carer gave examples of how she supported a young person emotionally and financially during a difficult pregnancy and also when the young person was planning to move to independent living.

Several carers informed the inspectors that they are receiving their agreed payments on time. Two carers stated they have experienced delays in the past, but after protracted negotiation, these have been resolved. The inspectors requested from the fostering manager, records of the payments made to foster carers by the fostering service. However, this was not provided. The inspectors were however satisfied that the service has in place, written guidelines on fees, allowances and other tax and financial matters. The Foster Carer Agreement also has a section that covers finance, including assurance that details of financial arrangements would be provided if requested.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

2, 4, 16, 17,20,22,23,24, 25, 26.

The fostering service has a complement of staff with the appropriate and relevant professional qualifications and experience to carry on the service but additional staff are still needed in key areas such as the kinship and long term fostering teams.

Continued effort and monitoring should be given to improving the quality of recordings to help ensure that information about the children and young people is comprehensive, up to date with audit trails and open to authorised inspections at anytime.

The fostering service has a number of relevant policies and procedures in place but more work is needed to help verify how quality assurance and the Five Outcomes for the looked after children and young people are measured and achieved.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors interviewed several managers and supervising social work staff in the fostering service during the inspection process. The inspectors were satisfied the service is managed by people who have the relevant qualifications and experience to help achieve the aims and objectives. The inspectors were satisfied that there was consistent support and supervision offered to staff in the fostering service. The records examined showed that supervision is planned for all staff. In one example, a staff member was given more regular supervision because the worker needed the additional supervisory support to help develop the skills necessary to be more focused to work in line with the rest of the team.

A number of staff interviewed by the inspectors reported that they were pleased with the increase in the staffing level of the service. One staff stated that this has 'enabled more work to be done, more monitoring and checking of potential foster carers homes, meetings with providers and working with other professionals in the borough'.

One manager reported that Form F assessments are done well, concerns are identified whether prospective carers are able to meet the needs of the looked after children and young people. The manager stated that the area in need of improvement related to the need for completed assessments to be passed to the relevant teams on time to help prevent backlog building up.

The inspectors met with a few foster carers and received completed questionnaires from many others before and after the inspection visit to the fostering service. The views expressed about support from the fostering service were mixed. A few carers reported they were satisfied with the support they are receiving from the fostering service, whilst others stated they are dissatisfied. A few carers who completed the CSCI questionnaire stated that support was 'ok', but most reported the support from the fostering service was less than satisfactory.

One experienced foster carer stated, 'if the fostering service provides counselling for foster carers, it will help them to process the support which they provide for the children in their care and by reflecting and processing their experiences in the counselling, they will release the bottled up emotion and will find the counselling process better way to deal with challenging behaviour of the children in their care.' Another foster carer wrote, 'what support.'

The findings indicated that the fostering service will need to make better efforts to ensure that the support it offers to each foster carer is targeted and specific to their needs and expressed wishes. The inspectors noted that although the fostering service has made good effort to offer a range of training programmes to foster carers, not all carers undertake these beyond the mandatory training each year. One carer told the inspectors they try not to miss any of the training programmes, whilst another stated they have not been to any apart from the introductory ones following their assessment.

The inspectors examined the training attendance sheet for the programme in kinship care. The social worker who helped to facilitate the training stated all the people listed on the sheet attended the training. However, when the inspectors spoke to one carer during a home visit, she stated that she did not attend the training.

The findings indicated that the fostering service will need to review this area of its work to help ensure that all foster carers are made aware of the importance of taking advantage of the training available to help improve their competencies and skills in delivering consistency and quality in foster care.

The inspectors also noted that the fostering service has employed a review worker to help clear the backlog of foster carer's reviews. The new worker has introduced new health and safety/safe caring monitoring checks form and is working closely with the children's social workers to identify issues that need attention. The worker reported that there is plan to develop a Serious Concerns Review in addition to reviewing other areas of the foster care placements.

The information supplied by the fostering service at the time of this inspection indicated that as of November 2005, there were 97 short-term placements, 33 long-term placements and 10 Regulation 38. The inspectors examined a number of cases and the findings indicated some cases have drifted and although the worker is now prioritising the backlog, the findings indicated that not all the reviews will be completed on time.

The inspectors noted that commendable effort has been made by the fostering service to audit case files and records in line with the guidelines of the fostering service. However, several of the cases examined by the inspectors needed further work to bring uniformity and clearer audit trail. Some files were poorly organised and documents in the main body did not always reflect the headings in the subject index. Some records were also disorganised and not prepared to the standard laid out by the Fostering Service policy and procedural guidelines. In addition, most foster carers case records had no photographic evidence of their identity.

Records of placements made to individual foster carers were also absent from most files. However, after request, the inspectors were provided with data information about the placements matching made to each foster carer. It was not easy to do an audit trail for each carer or identify which files related to kinship carers for example.

The service manager informed the inspectors that a new IT system-Frame Work I -is being introduced to various sections of the social services department in a gradual process. It is hoped this will create more uniformity and easier authorised access across the children and family services, including the ability of staff to carry out and record assessments more timely and efficiently. It is also hoped that this system will help to ensure better monitoring and checks of the looked after children and young people are carried out.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	4
6	3
8	2
9	2
15	3
30	X

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

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

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

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	X
2	4
4	2
5	X
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	3
21	3
22	2
23	3
24	2
25	2
26	2
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
1	FS12	15	<p>The fostering service must ensure that copies of all required information, including health records of every child, young person and foster carers are available in the case files and on records held in the fostering service.</p> <p>The fostering service must ensure that the Brent Foster Carers Handbook includes information and guidelines to foster carers on how best to manage and administer medication for the children and young people being looked after.</p>	30/05/06
2	FS4	11,12, 35	<p>The fostering service must ensure that a more robust and comprehensive monitoring of each placement is carried out for every child and young person in its care- to help ensure that their safety, welfare and wellbeing is protected at all times.</p>	30/05/06
3	FS8	34	<p>The fostering service must ensure that at all times, the matching consideration for every child and young person is made</p>	30/05/06

			in their best interest and where possible- their views about the placements are taken into account before placements are made.	
4	FS22	17	The fostering service must ensure that it works more collaboratively with all fosters carers and make better attempts to resolve any outstanding disputes/issues with foster carers.	30/05/06
5	FS25	30,32	<p>The fostering service must ensure that its case records for looked after children and foster carers are maintained in a more uniform and satisfactory manner at all times. This must be done in ways that enable easy audit trails and inspections to be carried out.</p> <p>The fostering service must provide training where needed to help ensure that all foster carers are able to make appropriate recordings for each looked after child and young person that reflect their individual experience.</p>	30/05/06
6	FS26	23	The fostering service must ensure that the planned improvements to the internal physical environmental condition of the building used by the service; are carried out to help ensure it becomes more user friendly for staff and the public. Effort must be made to ensure that the public facilities on the ground floor are maintained in a more hygienic condition.	30/05/06
7	FS4	43 Sch. 8	The Fostering Service must ensure that the CSCI is notified of any significant events or incidents affecting the wellbeing of, or involving the looked after children and young people.	30/04/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS7	The fostering service should ensure that each foster carer fully understands, is able to and comply fully with the borough's diversity policy and procedures. The service should also that the diversity needs of every child and young person placed with a foster carer can be and is been adequately met.
2	FS1	The Fostering Service should consider providing in the Handbook and Statement of Purpose, more specific information about safe caring plus guidelines and information about The Every Child Matters- Five Outcomes objectives, for looked after children and young people.
3	FS17	The fostering service should continue to ensure that the service is adequately staffed to help clear the backlog of foster carers reviews and the processing of assessments.
4	FS23	The fostering service should ensure that every effort is continued to be made to get all foster carers to attend relevant training such as First Aid and Diversity.

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