



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

**London Borough of Redbridge Fostering
Service**

**Station Road
Barkingside
Ilford
Essex
IG6 1NB**

Lead Inspector
Peter Allcock

Announced Inspection
25th September 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 Redbridge Fostering Service
Address	Station Road Barkingside Ilford Essex IG6 1NB
Telephone number	020 8708 7870
Fax number	020 8708 7887
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	London Borough of Redbridge
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Martin Halsey
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 19th September 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The London Borough of Redbridge Fostering and Adoption Service is located at the Station Road Centre, Station Road, Barkingside, Ilford. The Fostering and Adoption Service is incorporated into the Children Living Away from Home Division of the Trust, with the Fostering and Adoption Senior Team Manager reporting directly to the Head of the Children's Trust. The Fostering and Adoption Service also provides support to staff and service users within the Children with Statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Division, and the three Children's Resource Centres that operate as the Community Services Division of the Trust.

Management responsibility consists of a Senior Team manager, who manages three team managers, who in turn provide management support across the two teams for fostering and adoption. The teams comprise of the Development team, Placement Support Team and Business and Finance Team. The Development Team are responsible for recruitment, training and assessment of prospective foster carers and adopters, as well as assessment of private fostering arrangements and private fostering publicity, permanency planning and family finding services.

The Placement Support Team is responsible for providing advice and support to foster carers and adopters, and deals with concerns and complaints. The team also deals with inter-county adoption, letterbox contact and provides other post approval adoption services.

The Business and Finance Team is responsible for the administration, business support and the financial function of the service.

The fostering and Adoption Service also hold quarterly joint meetings with the Foster Carer Association, monthly drop-in sessions for foster carers, a flexi-carers scheme, and an out of hours telephone helpline managed by Link Foster Carers.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was undertaken at extremely short notice, and the inspector would like to thank the management and staff of the fostering service for their professionalism and assistance in the conduct of this inspection.

What the service does well:

The fostering service is well managed, with systems in place to monitor its performance against national and local objectives. The fostering service has a committed and enthusiastic staff team who are well supported by their managers.

Training opportunities for foster carers are excellent, and children and young people's educational achievement is well supported. The support for contact provided by foster carers allows children and young people to maintain appropriate relationships, which are important to them.

The young people and foster carers who responded to the inspection by questionnaires confirmed that the fostering service operated to promote the welfare of young people and to support foster carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Following a requirement made at the last inspection, foster carers have received training in working with children and young people from a different cultural background to their own.

What they could do better:

Following this inspection, there are two requirements made following the observation of the fostering panel. The responsible persons must ensure that all foster carers have an annual review, and that information presented to panel is up to date. From the inspector's discussions with staff and reading of foster carers files, these lapses are unusual, since practice in these areas is usually of a good standard.

The fostering service is aware that it needs to recruit foster carers for adolescents and 'difficult to place children'. Children and young people would benefit from the provision of more informal opportunities to give their views and opinions.

3 foster carers who contributed to the inspection via questionnaires stated that they felt the fostering service could provide better information at the time of placement, particularly when the placement is made as a result of an emergency.

2 respondents also considered that the fostering service could be more supportive/appreciative of foster carers.

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

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

Children and young people can be confident that the foster carers they are placed with will promote their health and development.

EVIDENCE:

NMS 12 – Health and Development

Information provided by the fostering service suggests that 88% of the children and young people currently placed by the service have received an annual health check in the last twelve months. Foster carers have received training in promoting young people's health, and there is detailed written guidance on the expectations that the service has of how foster carers promote young people's health and well being.

A number of children who replied to the questionnaires sent by the inspector stated how their foster carers encourage them to take regular exercise, and eat a healthy diet. Foster carers can access specialist support from professionals dealing with drug abuse, the looked after children's nurse or a community psychiatric nurse with specific responsibilities for looked after children.

The foster carers visited during this inspection were knowledgeable as to their responsibilities to promote the health and developments of the children and young people in their care.

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, 30

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

The welfare of young people is safeguarded by the recruitment and selection of suitable staff and carers, and the policies and procedures put in place to protect them from abuse. The welfare of children and young people may be put at risk in the very small number of cases in which their carers are not reviewed on time, or by the failure to ensure the panel can have oversight of the operation of the fostering service based on up to date information.

EVIDENCE:

NMS 3 - The Registered Persons

Documentation held by the Commission for Social Care Inspection as part of the registration process, and records held by the fostering service, contain evidence that demonstrate that the appropriate checks and references have been undertaken to ensure that the responsible persons are suitable persons to run a service concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of vulnerable children and young people.

NMS 6 – Foster Carers

The inspector visited three foster homes, which were providing safe, nurturing and healthy environments. Each foster home has a health and safety visit as part of the foster carer assessment process, and there was evidence on foster carers files that these are updated annually as part of the carers review. All the foster carers visited during this inspection were aware that they may be visited or interviewed as part of the Commission's inspection process.

NMS 8 - Matching

The fostering service aims to provide a good match between a child /young person and a foster carer who the service feels can meet their needs. There is a shortage of foster carers able to meet the needs of adolescent and 'more difficult to place children', and the fostering service is aware that it needs to recruit more foster carers who are able to meet the needs of these young people. Where a match cannot be made in house, a placement is sought with an independent fostering agency.

Evidence seen on young people's files demonstrated that a child/young persons ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic heritage are considered as part of the matching process, and as stated elsewhere in this report, a placement is sought that will minimise any possible disruption to their education.

NMS 9 - Safeguarding

Safeguarding is given a high priority by the fostering service which supports its clear policies and procedures to safeguard the welfare of children and young people by the provision of both pre and post approval training to foster carers. Foster carers files seen during this inspection contained safe caring guidelines, and foster carers visited during this inspection told the inspector how they were put into practice on a daily basis. The welfare of children and young people is further promoted by clear guidelines forbidding the use of corporal punishment, training on managing challenging behaviours, and a clear written procedure if a child or young person goes missing from their placement. This procedure has been agreed with the police.

NMS 15 - Staff

Documentation held by the London Borough of Redbridge Personnel Department, contain evidence that demonstrate that the appropriate checks and references have been undertaken to ensure that the fostering service only employs suitable persons to work in a service concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of vulnerable children and young people.

Whilst there are robust procedures in place for the recruitment and selection of staff, the inspector was disappointed to find that there had been no improvement in the presentation of staff files held in the personnel unit. Staff

files consisted of un-indexed bundles of paper held in envelope files, and retrieving the required information from them was time consuming and difficult. The inspector shares the same concerns as the last inspector about the quality of these records and the recommendation that the London Borough of Redbridge personnel department resolve this issue is restated.

The assessment of prospective foster carers and the supervision of those who have been approved are only undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced staff.

NMS 30 – Fostering Panel

There are clear policies and procedures in place to guide the operation of the panel. The inspector attended the meeting of the fostering and adoption panel, which was held on the 3/10/06, and was impressed by the detail and diligence shown by panel members who were well prepared to undertake their responsibilities. Questioning of social workers was detailed, and great care was taken to ensure that written records were fully accurate.

The inspector noted that one foster carer had not had a review since 2004, and it is a requirement that all foster carers must be reviewed on an annual basis, and a report presented to the adoption and fostering panel in a timely manner. The inspector was concerned that a referral duty worker without a manager present to support their work presented one review, and this concern was raised with senior managers responsible for the fostering service. The inspector also noted that there was some confusion caused by the fact that the report of the review was 4 months out of date, and the panel was not presented with the full current picture. It is a further requirement that the panel is presented with an up to date report of reviews, and where necessary an addendum to the report be supplied by the responsible social worker.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13, 31

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

Children and young people benefit from the support given to their educational achievement, and clear arrangements for short break services. Whilst the service clearly values diversity and promotes equality, the practical expression of this commitment requires a targeted approach to the recruitment of new carers.

EVIDENCE:

NMS 7 - Diversity

The fostering service provides written guidance to foster carers on working with children and young people from diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Information on a child's background and history is used to inform the matching process. The local authority employs a Diversity Programme Manager, and training on issues of diversity and equality is available to managers and staff as part of the in house training programme, and to foster carers as part of their training programme.

The inspector examined one file in which a young person was placed with carers of a different ethnic and cultural background. The young person's file included detailed guidance for the foster carer on how they would meet the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic needs of the young person placed with

them. The inspector also noted on two young people's files that the fostering service had arranged for them to have religious instruction from a Muslim teacher who is teaching them the Koran.

NMS 13 - Education

The arrangements for meeting the educational needs of looked after children are set out in the foster carers handbook, and the majority of foster carers have received training in the last year on supporting children and young people's education. The matching process places great emphasis on securing a placement that will not disrupt children or young people's education, and the fostering service has ensured that the children and young people it places who are of school age have access to a computer. Foster carers can seek specialist advice from the corporate parenting team, which includes two educational advisory teachers and one education welfare officer.

To support looked after children and young people in engaging with leisure activities, there is a Leisure Card which offers them a discount on sports and leisure activities available locally, and one young person told the inspector that she uses the card to go swimming more often than she would otherwise be able to afford.

NMS 31 – Short Term Breaks

The fostering service does not provide a short term break service, but does have an agreement with the Indigo Project, an independent fostering agency run by Banardos, which provides a range of residential and day care respite services for children and young people with disabilities. The arrangements with this organisation, which is registered and inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection recognise that birth parents remain central to the promotion of the child or young person's health and education needs.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10, 11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

Children and young people benefit from the support given to contact arrangements that enable them to maintain appropriate relationships that they value with their family and friends. There are formal opportunities for young people to influence the arrangements for their day-to-day lives and their futures, which the service could develop by the provision of more informal consultation opportunities.

EVIDENCE:

NMS 10 - Contact

Contact arrangements are set out in children and young people's foster placement agreements in accordance with their care plans. Discussion with young people and foster carers demonstrated that foster carers support contact arrangements, which in some cases can involve contact visits several times a week. Foster carers spoken to during this inspection were aware that they are required to keep a written record of contact visits and any outcomes for the child that they are aware of.

NMS 11 – Consultation

The foster carers visited were able to describe how they consult with the children and young people placed with them, and two children told the inspector that their carers always ask them what they want to eat, or what

social activities they would like to take part in. Children's questionnaires returned to the inspector demonstrated that children and young people are aware of who to complain to, and there is a list of useful contacts in the children's guide to whom children can complain or seek advice and support.

The inspector spoke to the complaints manager, who said that children rarely use the complaints procedure, and the service is aware that it could do more to provide more informal opportunities for children and young people to give their views.

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):

14, 29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

Young people benefit from stable placements and from the financial security provided to foster carers by the regular payment of allowances and appropriate expenses.

EVIDENCE:

NMS 14 – Preparation for Adulthood

The fostering service provides written guidance to foster carers setting out their expectations that foster carers prepare young people for semi-independent and independent living. Pathway plans were seen on the files of young people, and one young person told the inspector how her foster carer helps and supports her to be more independent.

NMS 29 – Allowances and Expenses

There is a written statement of the allowances payable to foster carers, and information on the expenses that foster carers may claim. These are reviewed annually, and an updated breakdown of payable allowances and expenses is sent to all foster carers. Discussion with a number of foster carers suggested that allowances and agreed expenses are paid correctly and on time, although some foster carers who responded by questionnaire stated that more could be done to improve funding for children's activities, including independent living skills, for damage caused to foster carers homes and for children's clothing.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17, 20, 21, 23, 24, 32

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

This is a well-managed service providing excellent training opportunities for foster carers. The limited management support available to the service may hinder future development of the service.

EVIDENCE:

NMS 17 - Experience and Qualifications of Staff and Carers

The fostering service has an experienced and committed team of social workers, who have continued to provide good support to foster carers through a period of significant change, as the fostering service becomes part of the newly formed Children's Trust.

There is a clearly set out process for the assessment of foster carers based on The British Association of Adoption and Fostering form F, and includes consideration of all the matters set out in national minimum standards 17.6 and 17.7 in considering the suitability of applicants to become foster carers.

NMS 20 – Staff Accountability and Support

The staff of the fostering service have written job descriptions, which clearly set out their duties and the responsibilities. There are supervision and appraisal systems in place, and the inspector saw that appropriate records of these meetings are kept.

The inspector is concerned that this service, which undertakes foster carers recruitment, training, support, adoption services and the oversight of private fostering arrangements has the full time equivalent of just 1.5 managers. It is strongly recommended that the fostering service review the level of management staff currently assigned to the fostering and adoption service.

NMS 21 – Strategy for Working With and Supporting Foster Carers

The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers. Foster carers have written information on how to access support including out of hours support, and the arrangements for supervision. The fostering service does not currently run a support group, and the current group set up by local foster carers was not felt by some Black carers to be inclusive. It is recommended that the fostering service review the support offered to foster carers, particularly the encouragement of appropriate support groups that can appropriately meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of foster carers. One foster carer who responded by questionnaire, considered that more could be done by the fostering service to address issues of equality and diversity.

NMS 23 – Training for Foster Carers

The fostering service provides pre-approval and induction training for prospective and new foster carers, and has a commendably comprehensive regular programme of ongoing training providing regular opportunities for staff and foster carers to undertake training together. Training provided over the last year has included:

- Promoting the Education of Looked After Children
- First Aid – Lifesaver Babies and Children
- Children’s Rights
- Active Listening skills
- Drowning in Paperwork
- Taking Part in Childcare Reviews
- The Challenge of Working in partnership with birth parents
- Bereavement and Loss
- Safe Handling and de-escalation skills (SHADES)
- ADHA and Diet
- Stress Management
- Making sense of child care plans
- Moving Children on to permanence
- Preparation for Adult Life
- Redbridge Children Matter
- Assertiveness and stress management
- Protecting Children – Supporting Foster Carers
- Sexual Health and |Relationships

In order to increase the attendance of foster carers at training sessions, the fostering service has developed a credit rating system for all the courses that it provides, and foster carers who gain five credits in the year receive a significantly enhanced payment rate in recognition of their efforts.

The inspector considers that the training provided by the fostering service exceeds this national minimum standard.

NMS 24 – Case Records

The London Borough of Redbridge has clearly set out policies and procedures to ensure that staff are guided in the maintenance of an up to date and comprehensive case record for children and young people who are in foster care. There is evidence on children’s and foster carers files of regular management monitoring of the content and structure of children’s and foster carers files.

The inspector examined case records for eight children and young people and four foster carers. Files were of a good standard, with information clearly set out under the relevant headings, which made information easy to access. Foster carers spoken to during this inspection were aware of the reasons why

the children and young people in their care were being looked after and the long term plans for their care.

NMS 32 – Family and Friends as Carers

The child's social worker, or a member of that team undertakes assessments of family and friends carers. Prospective carers are expected to attend pre-approval foster carer training and the assessment based on the BAAF form F is presented to the fostering and adoption panel for their recommendation.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? **No**

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.	FS30	22	The responsible persons must ensure that that all foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis, and a report presented to the adoption and fostering panel in a timely manner.	31/03/07
2	FS30	27[2][e]	The responsible persons must ensure that the panel is presented with an up to date report of reviews, and where necessary an addendum to the report be supplied by the responsible social worker.	31/03/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS15	<p>The inspector was concerned that the personnel files in the personnel department were not appropriately sectioned, and information was difficult to find. It is recommended that this issue be resolved by the London Borough of Redbridge personnel department.</p> <p>This recommendation is repeated</p>
2	FS20	<p>It is strongly recommended that the fostering service review the level of management staff currently assigned to the fostering and adoption service.</p>
3	FS21	<p>It is recommended that the fostering service review the support offered to foster carers, particularly the encouragement of appropriate support groups that can appropriately meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of foster carers.</p>

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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