



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**London Borough of Barking & Dagenham  
Fostering Service**

**Social Services Department  
512a Heathway  
Dagenham  
Essex  
RM10 7SL**

*Lead Inspector*  
Peter Allcock

*Key Announced Inspection*  
11<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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](http://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

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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Ms Baljeet Nagra
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Authority Fostering Service

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      7th February 2006

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Fostering Service is a Local Authority Service. The service provides task centred, long term and kinship care for children and young people from 0- early 20's of age, and also monitors private fostering arrangements.

The Service is proactive in attempting to recruit foster carers from the local area. All potential carers are subject to a thorough assessment of their suitability, including statutory checks and completed 'Form F' assessments. In addition the service offers a comprehensive range of support, which includes home visits, and out of hours support as well as training to its approved foster carers.

The service has a placement finding role and liaises directly with the private and voluntary sector fostering and residential provision.

# SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection was conducted by Peter Allcock. Prior to the inspection, the inspector read the previous inspection report, information held on file in the Commission for Social Care Inspection offices and the pre-inspection information sent by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The inspector also held a pre-inspection meeting with senior staff of the fostering service and the Safeguarding children Manager, which greatly facilitated the smooth operation of this inspection.

The fieldwork for this inspection was undertaken between the 11th September 2006 and the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2006, and consisted of an examination of records and documents, held both in writing and electronically in the fostering service offices, and a tour of the office accommodation occupied by the fostering service.

The inspector conducted one to one interviews with:

- Group Manager – Looked After Children
- Team Manager – Fostering Service
- Children’s Rights Officer
- Councillor – Lead Member Children’s Services
- Social Worker – Assessment Team
- Senior Manager – Care Management Team
- Team Manager – Care Management Team
- Divisional Director – Safeguarding and Children’s Rights
- Team Manager – Looked after Children Health and Education Support
- Team Manager – Family Group Conferencing
- Chair-Local Safeguarding Children Board
- Chair Fostering Panel
- Three foster carers in their own homes
- Two foster children in placement
- Placement Officer
- Team Member – Human Resource Department

The inspector also held meetings with:

- A group of fourteen foster carers at a support group meeting
- A meeting with twelve staff of the fostering service
- Observation of the panel meeting held on the 05/09/2006

Questionnaires were distributed to all foster carers and all the children and young people aged 5 or over who are currently placed with the local authorities foster carers.

At the conclusion of the inspection fieldwork, the inspector held a feedback session with senior staff of the fostering service and the Safeguarding children Manager.

The inspector was greatly impressed by the importance that the management and staff of the fostering service place on the opportunity that inspection gives to describe the work of the service and to use the process as a positive learning opportunity. Both managers and staff were keen to describe their achievements, and were honest in their description of practice and resource areas, which required further work. Worthy of particular mention are the presentation of relevant documentation on a CD format, and the use of an evidence bank to record the requirements and recommendations of previous inspections, and to document the evidence of compliance with requirements and the putting into practice of recommendations. Information provided was of a high quality, and clearly indexed. Additional information requested during the inspection was provided promptly, and the inspector was greatly appreciative of the efforts made by managers and staff to describe the social, economic and political context of the setting in which the work of the fostering service takes place.

### **What the service does well:**

The fostering service is well managed, with systems in place to monitor its performance and a clear sense of the way that it wishes to develop the services it provides. There is a growing sense of coherence in the undertaking of its activities alongside colleagues from other council departments and the health authority. The role of corporate parent is taken seriously within the local authority. There is a committed and enthusiastic staff team who are well supported by accessible managers.

Consultation with young people and support for their educational achievement are areas of practice which have received a high level of priority within the fostering service, resulting in positive outcomes for children and young people. The support for contact allows children and young people to maintain appropriate relationships, which are important to them.

### **What has improved since the last inspection?**

Following the last announced inspection on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2006, a total of eleven requirements and five good practice requirements were made. Following this inspection, there is evidence to confirm that nine of these requirements have been met, and that the five recommendations have been put into practice. The inspector noted that there has been considerable progress in compliance with the two requirements that have not been met, and these are restated as described in the following paragraph entitled What they Could Do Better.

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has improved the consistency of the employment records of both permanently employed and temporary staff to ensure that they contain all the information required in regulation 20 and set out in schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001. The service has also ensured that all adult family members of foster carers, and their support networks have up to date enhanced disclosures from the Criminal records Bureau. This ensures that the fostering service is now in a position to demonstrate that all the people who have substantial access to the children and young people placed by the fostering service are suitable people to work with or care for vulnerable children and young people.

There have been improvements to the operation of the panel with regard to recording where panel members may disagree with recommendations, and by ceasing to operate a sub panel, there is now greater clarity in the oversight of foster carers reviews.

Notifications of significant events are now made consistently to the Commission for Social Care inspection, the majority of foster carers annual reviews are held within the required timescales and staff receive regular supervision, which is recorded.

The health and safety assessments of foster carers homes has been improved and are now more detailed in their assessment of potential threats to the safety and welfare of children and young people.

Good practice recommendations implemented from the last inspection have increased the support offered to kinship carers and given them access to the same training opportunities as foster carers. The fostering service has developed policy and procedures, which recognise the rights and responsibilities of parents whose children are receiving a respite care service.

## **What they could do better:**

There are two requirements from the previous inspection of 7<sup>th</sup> February 2006, which have not been fully met, and these are restated in this report, which makes an additional requirement.

There has been demonstrable progress in reducing the number of placements in which foster carers do not have all the required LAC paperwork, and those in which foster carers are caring for children and young people outside their terms of approval. These requirements are restated in order to allow the fostering service more time to fully address these issues. A requirement is made that all staff who supervise foster carers are appropriately qualified, although there is no evidence that the current arrangements disadvantage foster carers and the children and young people they care for.

There are three recommendations made in this report. It is recommended that the fostering service provide written guidance to staff on the quality of



accommodation it expects, provide training to encourage the full participation of all panel members and review the delivery of its foster carer training to maximise participation.

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](mailto: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.

The fostering service works effectively with other professionals to promote the Health of children and young people, who are given opportunities to learn how they can follow a healthy lifestyle. The health care outcomes of a small and decreasing number of children and young people may be compromised by the failure to provide relevant LAC information to all foster carers in a timely manner.

## EVIDENCE:

### NMS 12 – Health and Development

Foster carers spoken to during this inspection told the inspector that they receive a reminder when medical checks are due, and records held by the agency show that these appointments have taken place. Current information held by the fostering service indicates that they are on target to ensure that 98% of looked after children will have completed the required medical and dental checks.

Foster carers have received training in first aid, the misuse of drugs and alcohol and sexual health. The fostering service has also participated in "Healthy U" sessions which have sought to engage young people in aspects of their lives such as healthy school dinners, sexual health and road safety, and staff are currently receiving training to launch an initiative to reduce the high level of teenage pregnancy in the borough.

The LACHES team provide up to 10 groups a year which foster carers can attend, which provides training on a number of medical aspects of child care, self harm and emotional and behavioural difficulties.

At the last inspection a requirement was made that the registered manager must ensure that foster carers are provided with the looked after paperwork including signed medical consent without any delay. Whilst there has clearly been some progress in meeting this requirement, facilitated in part by the co-location of one of the children's teams in the same building as the fostering team, discussion with foster carers suggested that this requirement has not been fully met, and so this requirement is restated, as the original date of 07/04/06 for compliance has not been fully met.

# 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 safeguarding of children and young people is given a high priority by the fostering service, which whilst recruiting foster carers and staff who are demonstrably fit people to work with vulnerable children and young people, potentially incurs a level of risk to a few young people placed with foster carers outside their terms of approval.

## **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 person and the interim manager of the fostering service 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 provision of suitable accommodation for foster carers was discussed with staff and managers in the fostering service, as it is clear that the significant number of two bedroom homes, particularly in the Dagenham area place considerable restrictions on the potential number of placements available to the fostering service. The fostering service have worked with the housing department to identify a number of properties which could be made suitable to provide the space required by foster families. The fostering service has also been involved in the plans for the development of the Thames Gateway area in the south of the borough. The fostering service has asked for some homes to be designed in such a way that they can be easily extended to provide the space that foster carers require, and that the neighbourhoods in which they are located include appropriate play areas and the community services that foster families and the children and young people placed with them would need.

The difficulties placed on the fostering service by the housing stock available have contributed to a legacy of a significant number of out of borough placements through independent fostering agencies, and a significant number of foster carers who are caring for young people outside their original terms of approval. Both these issues were identified during the last inspection report, and the fostering service has taken a number of actions to address these issues, though clearly neither is amenable to quick resolution.

A significant number of out of borough placements are located in neighbouring local authorities, and the placement service seeks to place children and young people in such placements where in house provision is not available. Although not able to access the full range of services, the fostering service has worked hard to develop ways to communicate with and engage children and young people placed outside the borough. The position with regard to foster carers caring for children and young people outside their terms of registration is reviewed monthly at panel, and the fostering service continues to reduce the number of such placements.

The local authority has sought to restrict the need for young people to be looked after by foster carers by developing a high quality Family Group Conferencing service, which according to a recent independent report seen by the inspector, has had a significant impact on reducing the number of looked after children, and supporting families to care for children and young people within their own networks with appropriate support from the local authority.

The particular circumstances of the accommodation available to the fostering service make decision making with regard to accommodation challenging, and it is recommended that the fostering service provide written guidance to staff

on the quality of accommodation that it requires to be provided for the children and young people who it places.

### **NMS 8 - Matching**

The inspector discussed matching issues with managers and staff of the fostering and placement services. It is clear that the fostering service places considerable importance on matching foster carers and young people, and that their currently assessed needs, ethnic, religious and cultural needs are taken into consideration when attempting to achieve the best possible match. The foster placement agreements seen during this inspection included specific information on the criteria used in making the placement. At the last inspection, a requirement was made that the registered manager must ensure that foster carers are not operating outside their terms of approval and that any changes to the terms of approval are presented to the fostering panel. As described under national minimum standard 6, this now happens, though the number of placements made outside carers terms of approval remains a concern. This requirement is restated in the knowledge that this is a work in progress, and that progress has been made in the past year to address this situation.

### **NMS 9 - Safeguarding**

There is a high level of commitment within the local authority to safeguarding children and young people, and the fostering service has clear policies and procedures in place to protect children and young people from abuse. There are policies and procedures in place to safeguard children and young people who go missing from their placement.

The fostering service provides training for its staff and carers in child protection procedures, and safe caring guidelines were in place on all the foster carers files seen during this inspection.

The fostering service provides clear written guidance to foster carers describing how any form of corporal punishment is not acceptable. Questionnaires returned by young people placed by the fostering service indicated that none of the children and young people was being bullied in their foster home.

### **NMS 15 - Staff**

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has a clearly set out procedure for the recruitment and selection of staff, and there was documented evidence seen on five staff files that the required checks are made prior to employment. The inspector discussed staff recruitment with a member of the Human

Resource Team, who was able to demonstrate that there are procedures in place to renew checks at the required frequency, and that where there is a disclosure of an offence, the consideration of that offence in relation to the job applied for is undertaken at a senior level, and that these decisions are recorded. At the last inspection, a requirement was made that there are Criminal Records Bureau checks for adult members of foster carers households and in respect of their support networks. It was also required that all the information required in regulation and as set out in schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001 is available for all staff. Documentary evidence provided by the fostering service in their evidence bank demonstrated that these requirements have been met.

Discussion with a group of social workers demonstrated that those involved in assessment work were appropriately qualified and experienced, and that the team had a good knowledge and skills of the matters as set out in national minimum standard 15.5, such as relevant legislation, child development, the importance of complaints, the promotion of equality, diversity and individual rights, and knowledge of other relevant organisations, particularly education and health.

Unqualified staff and students working in the fostering service have their work supervised by a qualified social worker who retains accountability for this work.

Following a requirement made at the last inspection, the fostering service has provided written information setting out the reasons for employment gaps for its staff and the inspector therefore considers that this requirement is met in full.

### **NMS 30 – Fostering Panel**

To assess this national minimum standard, the inspector attended the panel meeting held on the 05/09/2006, read the minutes of the previous three panel meetings, interviewed the panel chair and read policies and procedures provided by the fostering service in their pre-inspection material.

At the last inspection, there were two requirements made in relation to the operation of the panel. The first was that individual panel members reasons and recommendations are recorded, and that changes to foster carers terms of approval agreed at the sub panel are fully presented to the full panel in detail. The inspector noted from the minutes of previous panel meetings and observation of one panel meeting that both these requirements have been met. Individual panel member's opinions were accurately recorded and the sub panel has ceased to operate, with all foster carers reviews now being placed before the full panel. The two good practice recommendations made at the last inspection have been met by ceasing to operate a fostering sub panel, and by



the drafting of a procedure to guide the operation of the panel when all members are not in agreement.

The fostering panel has recruited a panel whose make up is diverse, and in which there is specific health and education expertise, and the input of a current foster carer with another organisation.

The chair of the panel described how she met with the Divisional Director, Safeguarding and Children's Rights formally three times a year to exercise the quality control functions of the panel. The panel meeting, which was observed, gave careful consideration to the foster carer assessments and reviews which were presented for its consideration, however the inspector noted that some panel members contributed far more than others, and it is recommended that the fostering service provide training to the panel to ensure that there are systems in place to encourage the full participation of all members.

# 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 extensive 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 is an area for practice development of which the fostering service is aware.

## **EVIDENCE:**

### **NMS 7 - Diversity**

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has sound policies and procedures in place, which value diversity and promote equal opportunities. The fostering service has been successful in recruiting a staff team, which is culturally diverse, and foster carers are provided with written guidance and training on valuing diversity and promoting equal opportunities. There is also written information on equalities for children and young people contained in the children's guide.

The majority of carers provided by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham are from White families (83%), and whilst this may currently be reflective of the general population, it is clear that the population of the

borough is becoming more diverse. The inspector discussed diversity issues with a member of the placements team, and it is clear that ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds are taken into consideration when making placements. Placements are also made with private fostering agencies who may be better placed to provide a more diverse range of carers. Two foster carers told the inspector that they would welcome greater information on the culture and history of young people they were caring for who are of African descent.

The inspector discussed these issues with staff and manager's of the service, and there is a clear intention to implement the recommendations of a recent monitoring report which made recommendations that recruitment of foster carers be targeted at carers who can meet the needs of children and young people from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, and also children and young people who have a physical or learning disability.

### **NMS 13 - Education**

The fostering service continues to place a high priority on the educational achievement of the children and young people that it places, and has worked with colleagues in the well regarded LACHES [looked after children health and education support team] and those working in schools to support young people to remain in school, and to achieve their full potential. There are currently twenty-five children attending the Saturday morning homework club, and mentoring support and the opportunity to go on residential trips further support young people's achievements. The fostering service through the LACHES team is proactive in tackling absence from school, and monitors the attendance of looked after children on a daily basis. Much of the work of the LACHES team has focussed on raising the expectations of what children and young people can achieve educationally, and the achievement of looked after children in terms of GCSE results has increased over the last three years. Commendably there are now eleven looked after children going to university, and the inspector was struck by the sense of pride in this result from staff, managers and on a member level. Barking and Dagenham hold an annual ceremony which recognises and rewards the achievements of their looked after children.

The inspector considers that the work undertaken to promote the educational achievement of looked after children exceeds this national minimum standard.

### **NMS 31 – Short Term Breaks**

Following a recommendation made at the last inspection, the fostering service has developed a policy to meet the particular needs of children, young people and parents receiving a short-break/respite service. This policy states that parents remain central to the promotion of health and educational 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 excellent opportunities for young people to influence the arrangements for their day to day lives and their futures, through the extensive systems in place for consultation and support which the local authority has put into place.

## EVIDENCE:

### NMS 10 - Contact

The inspector saw written evidence on children's files, and through discussion with foster carers, that the fostering service promotes and supports contact arrangements so that children and young people can maintain appropriate relationships with family and friends who are important to them. The records of reviews seen during this inspection showed that the impact of contact arrangements on children and young people is regularly considered During Looked After Children Reviews.

### NMS 11 - Consultation

The fostering service has worked with a number of teams within the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham to provide a number of different ways in which children and young people can be consulted about their views. Children and young people are actively involved in the writing and editing of a bi-

monthly newsletter, and those placed outside the borough have the opportunity to join a postal club. There is a website for looked after children which is interactive, colourful and informative, and young people can complete the consultation documents for their reviews on line if they wish. Young people have attended the members corporate parenting group, and there is a drop in centre, which is popular with a number of the local authorities, looked after children. Young people have been involved in the recruitment and selection of staff, and a number of groups have been held focussing on particular issues of importance to children and young people. A number of professionals working in the local authority have attended Total Respect training, which is prepared and delivered by young people.

The fostering service has a clear complaints procedure, and has produced colourful and age appropriate leaflets for children and young people to inform them how to make a complaint, and who can assist them to make a complaint.

Children and young people who responded to questionnaires said that their foster carers asked their opinions on matters that affect both their day-to-day lives and their futures.

The inspector considers that the opportunities for consultation given to young people exceed that required by this national minimum standard.

# 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 throughout their education, and from the financial security provided to foster carers by the regular payment of allowances and appropriate expenses.

## EVIDENCE:

### NMS 14 – Preparation for Adulthood

Young people's files seen during this inspection contained pathway plans, setting out the help, support, knowledge and skills the young person would need to enable them to move on to a more independent setting. The Fostering service commendably will support young people in education by continuing to provide a foster placement for young people beyond sixteen years of age until they have completed their education.

### 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. A written breakdown of payable allowances and expenses is sent to all foster carers annually.

Discussion with a number of foster carers suggested that allowances are paid correctly and on time. One foster carer told the inspector that there had been delays with the payment of expenses in the past, but others told the inspector that payments for expenses are made promptly. The fostering service is

aware, that on occasion the payment of expenses has been delayed, and has improved the response time of expenses incurred to meet the individual needs of children and young people. The responsibility for the authorisation of allowances has been devolved from executive level to the Divisional Director of Safeguarding and Children's Rights.

# 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, 19, 20, 21, 22, 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 well managed fostering service which although strongly focussed on performance is supportive of both staff and foster carers, and provides good training and development opportunities for both. Case recording is generally sound and there are monitoring systems in place to inform managers of the



services performance, and to address identified shortfalls. There is a clear sense of direction in what the service wishes to achieve, and a sense of a fast developing coherence in its relationship to other departments of the local authority.

## **EVIDENCE:**

### **NMS 17 - Experience and Qualifications of Staff and Carers**

The fostering service has, like many London Local Authority fostering services struggled to recruit social workers with fostering experience, and has recruited a number of staff from overseas, and put in place a number of measures to encourage the retention of their salaried staff. Staff vacancies are currently being recruited to, and it is clear that this is a small team with a challenging workload. All but one of the social workers in the team is qualified, and it is planned that they will undertake the Diploma in Social Work next year. The manager of the fostering service who is an experienced and qualified social worker supervises her work.

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. The fostering service has entered into an agreement with an independent fostering agency who provide the local authority with foster carers who are trained and supported to provide a home for young people with more complex or challenging needs.

### **NMS 19 – Training Programme**

New foster carers attend a three-day preparation course, and a number have gone on to study for the NVQ level 3 in childcare, or the BTEC Advanced Foster Care training. The fostering service also provides regular training opportunities for foster carers through the year, although these take place during the day, which can restrict the opportunities of some carers to attend. It is recommended that the fostering service review the arrangements for the delivery of their training programme to maximise the attendance of foster carers.

### **NMS 20 – Staff Accountability and Support**

Staff records seen during this inspection contained written job descriptions outlining their roles and responsibilities, and discussions with a number of staff revealed a good understanding of the fostering services' policies and

procedures. At the last inspection it was noted that staff did not always receive regular supervision, and it was positive to note that this has been addressed with clear records of supervision and annual appraisal seen on staff files. Social work staff described their supervision, whilst clearly performance management focussed as supportive of both of their work and their professional development, although one member of staff was clearly disappointed not to be seconded onto a professional training course this year due to the limits currently placed on the budget for staff training. Minutes of staff meetings demonstrated that these occur on a regular basis, and that staff have the opportunity to raise relevant matters during these meetings.

## **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, the arrangements for supervision and the formation of support groups is actively encouraged. The inspector attended one support group, and noted that a small sub group of foster carers meets with senior managers of the service on a regular basis, which encourages a sense of working in partnership between the staff, managers and foster carers who provide the service.

## **NMS 22 – Supervision and Support for Foster Carers**

The fostering service has a clearly structured Foster Carers Agreement, which includes all the matters set out in Schedule 5, Regulation 28(5)(b) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001. The fostering service provides written information to carers on making complaints or representations, and this was confirmed by a number of foster carers who were all aware of how to make a complaint or representation should this be necessary.

The foster carers spoken to described the support they received in generally very positive terms, and a number of foster carers described individual examples of support from their supervising social worker.

The inspector discussed the implications of national minimum standard 22.3, with managers responsible for the fostering service. One member of staff currently supervising foster carers is unqualified, and will be undertaking social work training next year. Written records of work undertaken by this member of staff, and feedback from foster carers demonstrated their work to undertaken with diligence and skill, however this standard clearly states that foster carers must be supervised by a suitably qualified and experienced social worker, and that no leeway allowable. It is therefore a requirement of this inspection that the fostering service ensure that the formal supervision of foster carers is only undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced social workers.

## **NMS 24 – Case Records**

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has a detailed policy and procedures on case recording, which includes quality standards relevant to children's services, and guidance on confidentiality, what information should be considered to be of a sensitive nature and the Data Protection Act. The inspector commends the focus on case recording as a service to children and families.

During the inspection the inspector examined the case records of five young people and four foster carers. The organisation of both foster carers and children's files was generally good, with information filed in the relevant sections as indicated by the index on the front of each file. Case recording was generally good, and although there is still some work to do in order to achieve a consistent quality of recording, staff were clearly working hard to present the files as a story of what had happened, decisions made and the reasons behind those decisions. There was evidence on both children's and foster carers files of both regular case discussions during supervision, and of management audit of the content and quality of recordings.

The foster carers handbook sets out the fostering services expectations of the records to be maintained by foster carers, and the foster carers visited during this inspection were seen to be maintaining records appropriately.

## **NMS 32 – Family and Friends as Carers**

The written policies of the fostering service whilst acknowledging the applicability of the national minimum standards to carers who are family and friends also acknowledges their particular relationship to the child/young person who lives with them. Family and Friendship carers have access to the same support systems and training opportunities provided to all the fostering services foster carers.

# 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

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

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

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	4

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

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

Yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS8	26(1)(b) 34(1)(b)	The registered manager must ensure that foster carers are not operating outside their terms of approval and that any changes to the terms of approval are presented to the fostering panel.  <b>This requirement is restated, as the original date of 07/05/06 has not been fully met.</b>	30/03/07
2	FS12	17 (3) (b)	The registered manager must ensure that foster carers are provided with the looked after paperwork including signed medical consent without any delay.  <b>This requirement is restated, as the original date of 07/04/06 has not been fully met.</b>	30/03/07
3	FS22	17(1)	The fostering service must ensure that the formal supervision of foster carers is only undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced social workers.	30/03/07

## 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	FS6	It is recommended that the fostering service provide written guidance to staff on the quality of accommodation that it requires to be provided for the children and young people who it places.
2	FS30	It is recommended that the fostering service provide training to the panel to ensure that there are systems in place to encourage the full participation of all members.
3	FS19	It is recommended that the fostering service review the arrangements for the delivery of their training programme to maximise the attendance of foster carers.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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