



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service

**Room FR4.06
Fell Road
Taberner House
Croydon
Surrey
CR9 2BA**

Lead Inspector
James Pitts

Announced Inspection
6th to 17th 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 Croydon Fostering Service

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Taberner House
Croydon
Surrey
CR9 2BA

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Provider Web address

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

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mr Sammy Forbes

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 10th January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service caters for the needs of a community, which makes up the largest population of any of the London Boroughs. This results in the Authority needing to provide amongst the highest number of general fostering and specialised home based care placements in London. At the time of the inspection the authority had a total of 201 foster carers looking after 262 children (this is the combined number of carers and children placed in both services). The core function of the service is the recruitment, training and support of foster carers who can provide a range of flexible placements to match the needs of children from a diverse community. In order to support the placements the authority provides a 24 hour support service, a mentoring support scheme for all new foster carers in their first year of fostering, a confidential counselling service, a support group for grandparents who have fostered their own grandchildren, a support group for long term foster carers, support groups for Black & Asian carers, a support group for carers of children with a disability and a support group for foster carers of unaccompanied minors. There is also a remand fostering scheme.

SUMMARY

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

This was a predominantly themed inspection that focused largely on fostering placements where the carers are caring for children / young people who fall outside their original category of approval (for example, numbers of children in placement or either older or younger than approved age range). The children with a disability short break service was also reviewed as was a Regulation 38 carer and placement that had been approved in the last year (Regulation 38 refers to a carer who is a family member or friend of the child / young person or their birth family).

As referred to in the description of service section above, the London Borough of Croydon caters for the needs of a large and diverse population. This is reflected in the range of carers that are recruited in terms of race, religion, culture, language and lifestyle. This also results in there being a large number of placements required each year that the service strives hard to match with carers who reflect the heritage of the children / young people.

The inspection involved visiting specific carers and children in both services, a group meeting with carers and children, reviewing responses to questionnaires that were sent to children, carers and placing social workers and a review of information that was supplied by the services.

The volume and range of needs that the service caters for results in significant operational and management challenges. The volume of need that the services seek to address is by far the greatest of these challenges. This is the fourth inspection of the service since the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations came into force in April 2002. Since that time the service has shown year on year improvement and the Commission is pleased to report that, from the evidence which was gathered at this inspection, significant and continuing progress has again been achieved. It is notable that all of the requirements and recommendations that were made at the previous inspection have been addressed.

The Commission's inspection team would like to take this opportunity to offer their own congratulations to the carer who was recognised with an MBE in the New Year honours list for their outstanding service to providing care for children with a disability in Croydon. Our congratulations are also extended to the carers who received a "Parent of the year" award that was sponsored by a locally based charitable organisation.

What the service does well:

The Inspection team are once again pleased to report that this diligence is evident and that a great deal of emphasis is placed on meeting the children's health care needs whilst receiving foster care.

The overall management of the fostering services is effective and there is a marked degree of commitment to making continuing positive changes.

The best interests of children & young people when being placed with carers are given the proper consideration and that their carers know how to keep them safe from harm.

The fostering services, and in particular the foster carers, strive to make the experience of being in foster care as positive and enjoyable as possible for children & young people.

The services are committed to encouraging and maintaining children / young people's contact with their families. The services have also made, and will continue to make, improvements to the way in which they are asked about their views and will then make a commitment to respond and act on the things that children & young people say.

Foster carers in both services can feel confident that the authority has effective systems in place to provide them with the allowances that they are entitled to. Where there are queries or suggestions for improvement they can feel confident that these will be looked at and reviewed by the authority.

The overall day to day management and operation of the services is competent, effective and demonstrates an acute awareness of the ongoing development that is required. There is also a clear commitment to making improvements and the Commission is confident that this ethos will continue.

What has improved since the last inspection?

From the requirements and recommendations that arose as a result of the previous inspection the following significant improvements have been made:

The fostering service now ensures that the reasons why trans cultural / trans racial placements are made is transparent and that the reasons why a placement are made are clearly in evidence.

Annual reviews of foster carers now take place consistently. The general fostering service updated all previous out of date reviews and have reviewed all carers subsequently.

The general fostering service now ensures that foster care agreements are in place for each child placed with a respective foster carer at all times.

The fostering panel should receive management information from both fostering services about the holding and outcome of reviews that are not referred to it. This is in order to discharge their functions in this regard.

For both the general and, even more specifically, the Children with a Disability service the children's guides have been expanded upon in other formats and media which makes these accessible to a wider range of children. The fostering services have also established a method of obtaining children's views on a more regular basis.

A specific question is asked of all referees' as to whether they have any knowledge that would suggest an applicant is unsuitable to work with children.

That Services have monitored and reviewed the data base information in order to identify any shortfalls in performance and to ensure that data is updated to provide accurate management information.

The fostering services now include an explanation of the role of the CSCI in the induction training for carers and explain that carers may be visited as a part of the Inspection process.

The home based care service is transparent with families and children about why specific service levels exist that may result in either a lack or reduction of service.

The general fostering service has responded to the views of a number of carers that supervised contacts would best be held at a specific venue and that the safety of children and carers are considered as a priority in making contact arrangements.

The children with a disability home based care service has produced written guidance for the out of hours duty service on how to respond to calls from carers that provide home based care to children.

Both the general and CWD fostering services have improved upon their recording of evidence that foster carer supervision occurs.

Both of the fostering services have developed an operational strategy that seeks to address foster carer reluctance in some cases to update their training.

The home based carers for children with disabilities benefit from a self help group. Both fostering services have established a system for offering support to the birth children of foster carers and also publicise the nature of the support and it's availability.

The fostering services have verified that carers are aware of and understand the details about which allowances they may claim.

That both fostering services and the fostering panel have developed and agreed guidelines about the specific meaning in relation to approved age ranges for children placed with foster carers.

What they could do better:

The CWD service needs to improve upon confirming that the POCA check for carers have been done and those that have not must have one taken up.

It is still necessary that the CWD service applies the necessary protocol and arrange for at least one annual unannounced visit to foster carers, and more frequent unannounced visits if there are concerns and / or a need to provide additional support and guidance for carers.

The Commission strongly recommends that Authority address the issue of haphazard and often inadequate placing social work support. Additionally a greater degree of understanding about the role and function of fostering services should be communicated across the children's service s department.

For more generalised placements the general fostering supporting social work team should establish a locally agreed common understanding about the list of matching priorities.

The general fostering service should take steps to address these concerns with the leaving care team about the quality of support that is provided to 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

The children / young people and their family's can feel confident that the services seek to properly address the physical and emotional health care needs when they are placed with fostering and short break carers.

EVIDENCE:

The General fostering service reports that following arrangements are currently available to children in Croydon

Designated Nurse for looked after children.

All foster carers are required to register children placed with their GP. This is then said to be checked at each statutory review.

Access to Paediatric services, annual health checks and school nurse.

Health Visitors are actively encouraged to attend statutory reviews

CAMHS Service (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service)

The information that was gathered as a result of the case tracking exercise indicates that the health care needs of children and young people are usually properly considered. One specific concern was raised about whether a placing social worker was sufficiently aware of the legal status of sibling children placed with a carer. This has resulted in delays to these children receiving inoculations as there is a lack of clarity about who may provide medical consent. The supporting social worker undertook to resolve this issue with the placing district social work team immediately after it was raised.

In effect the need for diligent application of health care protocols and addressing medical needs continues to have a far greater degree of day to day

relevance in the children with a disability home based care service. Due to the varying types of disability that children have, often associated with other medical conditions and very specialised methods of care, this service has a need to apply diligence in this area. The Inspection team are once again pleased to report that this diligence is evident and that a great deal of emphasis is placed on meeting the children's health care needs whilst receiving home based 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

The children / young people and their families can feel confident that the overall management of the fostering services is effective, with the exception that a small number of carer reviews still need to be updated. They can also feel assured that their best interests when being placed with carers are given the proper consideration and that their carers know how to keep them safe from harm. This positive work could, however, be undermined if other departments within the authority that are involved with the care planning of children / young people do not address the issues of more consistent support and improved understanding of the role and function of fostering.

EVIDENCE:

The management of the general fostering service remains unchanged from that which was reported at the previous inspection. The Responsible Individual is the Divisional Director of Children's Services Mr S. Liddicott (who has ultimate responsibility for both the general and children with a disability fostering services) and the Manager is Mr S. Forbes who is the Service Manager for Access to Resources, which includes the Fostering Service. The team manager for the Children with a Disability service is Mrs Jane Donson. Both Mr Forbes and Mrs Donson are once again able to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the complex needs of the respective

fostering services, and have a detailed understanding of the continuing challenges that the services face.

Foster carers homes that were visited were warm, adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness. From the carers files that were sampled it was evident that there has been significant improvement to the frequency of health and safety assessments. Those foster carers homes that were visited were found in all cases to be free of avoidable hazards as required under standard. Foster carers training does cover health and safety issues. No health and safety issues were identified at the visits of these carers and all of their particular annual reviews were up to date and included health and safety considerations.

It was recommended by the Commission as a result of the previous inspection that the fostering services should explain of the role of the CSCI to carers generally and more specifically to new carers during their induction training. An information pamphlet has now been produced and revised foster carer agreements indicate that carers are expected by the fostering services to co-operate with the inspection process.

The London Borough of Croydon has a policy of placing children within the Authority's own local service provisions, but will also use locally based (if possible) independent fostering agencies if that is what is required to offer a suitably matched placement. The stated aim of this policy is to maintain as many placements in the local area as possible, except where the safety of a child would make this inappropriate. The increased number of carers from diverse communities makes this policy more workable that was the case at the previous inspection.

The Inspection Team focused largely on placements in the general fostering service where the carer has an exception for trans racial / cultural placements, ages of children in placement or over their original approval number. At present there are 14 such cases, 7 of which were reviewed as a part of this inspection. The Commission does not have concerns about the placements that were examined as they were seen to be highly beneficial for children / young people. The authority is now providing better evidence of the additional resources, support and information that has been made available to the carers in order to support successful placements. The specific area of concern that was raised not only by carers but is recognised by the inspection team is that there is rather haphazard support from placing district social work teams. In a small number of cases positive support was seen to be achieved, however this is the exception rather than the rule. Frequent changes of the allocated district social worker, poor progress on implementing care plans and even a lack of knowledge about the legislation covering childcare were all seen to occur. This poses a significant risk in undermining the positive work that does take place in carers own homes and is something that the authority overall needs to address.

From the discussions that the inspection team had with team members in the general fostering service there would appear to be some differences in individual understanding of the priorities to be considered when matching placements. This would appear to be of particular relevance when needing to make emergency placements. In some cases a child may have highly specialised needs that take precedence above other considerations. However, for more generalised placements the team should establish a locally agreed common understanding about the list of matching priorities.

The inspection team noted no concerns about the children with a disability home based care service. This continues to offer suitable and highly beneficial placements and support for the children and their families who rely on the service.

Training of foster carers in the last year has included child abuse, safe caring and a two part managing behaviour course. There continues to be effective policies regarding inappropriate punishments and this includes the non use of corporal punishment, which all carers are expected to abide by. These matters are also referred to in the foster carers handbook. Home based carers for the children with a disability service confirmed that their initial training consider many aspects of protection, such as signs and symptoms and what to do if they suspect any form of abuse. The home based carers who were visited again demonstrated an awareness and understanding of the issue of abuse, and could act appropriately in response to any concerns if they need to.

The Inspection team reported as a result of the previous inspection that there were significant concerns about the lack of diligence of the London Borough of Croydon in taking up CRB checks. This issue has now been addressed in terms of criminal records. However, in the Children with a Disability Service there were seen to be 5 carers who had CRB checks that did not indicate that a POCA (Protection of Children Act) check had also been requested or received.

During a panel meeting that was attended during the previous inspection it was noted that there were differing understandings amongst the panel of what approved age range actually meant. For example; is an approval from birth until the Child's second birthday or is it from birth to a day before the child's third birthday? For this reason it was recommended that both the fostering services and the fostering panel develop and agree guidelines about the specific meaning in relation to age range approval categories. The Commission can report that this has now been fully clarified.

A panel meeting was not attended during this inspection. The reason for this is that it has been clearly in evidence at previous inspections that the panel fulfils its functions properly and with due diligence. The Chair of the panel was, however, interviewed. The chairperson commented that as a result of a recommendation that was made at the previous inspection the Authority has

clarified the panel's role with regard to the receipt of management information and the need to provide a quality assurance function for the fostering services. It was also strongly advised by the Commission as a result of the previous inspection that a representative from the children with a disability home based care service sits on the panel or is at least available to offer professional advice. This now occurs whenever a case involving the children with a disability short break service is presented to the panel for consideration.

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

The children / young people and their families can feel confident that their carers and the fostering services will strive to make their experience of being in foster care as positive and enjoyable as possible.

EVIDENCE:

Croydon supports a range of foster carers who represent diverse cultural, racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds. The previous inspection of the general fostering service highlighted that there were shortfalls in being able to provide matched placements for babies from black communities and that strategies were put into place to attempt to address this. The Commission can report that since then these strategies have clearly begun to work as the diversity of placement options has broadened. As an example, below is a breakdown, provided by the authority, of the diversity of carers that have been approved to foster in the last year:

Total Number of Approvals	35
Total Number of Approved places	64 (of which 5 Reg 38s)

Caribbean:	37%
White British:	20%
African:	14.3%
Mixed Partnership:	8.6%

Asian:		8.6%
Any other White:		5.7%
Dual Heritage:		5.7%

Within the Children with a Disability service, carers and supporting social workers acknowledge that appropriate equipment is available to enable children to lead as independent a life as possible. This includes the provision of car seats, stair gates, gloves and aprons. In addition, specific training is given to carers who need to tube feed, use hoists or give specific medication. There is recognition that for some children with severe physical disabilities or those who use wheelchairs, the service that is available to them is restricted. This is because there were few carers who have specifically adapted homes. There is a broad acknowledgement that funding is not infinite in this area, and that on occasions as an alternative the children may receive care in their own family home instead.

The Fostering Service still does not on a regular basis monitor the educational achievements of the children placed with its foster carers, as this is in large part the responsibility of placing social workers. The London Borough of Croydon does, however, continue to hold an annual awards event that celebrates children's achievements in education for which carers may nominate children for an award. The Fostering Service involves a Looked After Children Education Team to provide input in the training of foster carers and actively promote their educational attainment. Foster carers are expected to support the children in their education and where agreed liaise with schools. Foster carers also contribute to the children's Personal Education Plan, and from the cases tracked, it is again evident that there continues to be more diligence from placing Social Workers in district Social Work teams to ensure that these plans are completed for all children and then updated annually.

It should be noted that in the vast majority of cases that children with a disability who make use of the home based care service are usually in the full care of their birth family. Children's educational support needs are therefore not something that this service would normally have a significant involvement with. The fact that the children, in most cases, remain in the legal care of their birth family is also reflected in the broader policies and procedures of the children with a disability service.

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

The children / young people can rest assured that their contact with their families will be encouraged, supported and maintained. They can also feel confident that the fostering services have made, and will continue to make, improvements to the way in which they are asked about their views and will then make a commitment to respond and act on the things that children & young people say.

EVIDENCE:

The importance of maintain family contact with birth parents and siblings in particular (where appropriate) continues to be properly stressed and given due importance by the general fostering service. In the vast majority of cases, children who are placed for short break home based care are in the full time care of their own family and contact issues are rarely an area that needs to be addressed by this service.

The feed back from a number of carers at the previous inspection referred to safety concerns about contact where it needs to be supervised because of possible risks to the child and even a history of violence towards other people by the birth parent or parents. The Commission therefore recommended at that time that the general fostering service should explore the views of a number of carers that supervised contacts would best be held at a specific venue. This was not least so that the expressed concerns about the safety of children and carers were considered as a priority in making contact arrangements. The Commission can report that a specific venue is available although supervised contact visits are encouraged to take place in carer's own homes where safety considerations permit this to occur. The inspection team note very positively that there is without doubt a high degree of commitment

by foster carers to assist the children / young people to maintain contact with their birth families.

One area of concern that was raised about contact was where particular carers perceived a lack of understanding by some placing social workers about the role of carers. This was specifically the case where birth families might request additional contact when carers had other commitments to fulfil on the same day and time. The perception is that there was a lack of willingness to negotiate or make alternative arrangements. This was commented upon in cases where placing social workers that had not trained in the UK may not be fully aware of the system and agreements that operate. For this reason the inspection team recommends that the fostering service clarify the role of carers with the district social work teams.

In addition to visits to individual foster carers and children / young people, a consultation evening was held so that the inspection team could offer a wider opportunity for those that wished to attend to make comments. This years meeting between the Commission and the young people who receive care, was held at a local Community Centre. Five young people attended the discussion all of which were from the main fostering service; they were between five and thirteen years old. In general the young people were positive about their experiences in care, they liked their foster carers and enjoyed all the activities and outings that they went on. The young people felt that their views were listened to by adults, however the majority were rather vague about the plans for their future, and said that they would like to know more clearly what was going to happen to them.

The effort of the supervising social worker teams and carers in setting up and managing this event is appreciated and the Inspection Team would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved, and in particular the children and foster carers who attended.

In addition to those that attended the meeting, the Commission received 15 written questionnaires from children who are placed with the services. In some instances these were completed with the help of a parent / carer, specifically where a child is placed with the home based care service. These views showed that children are overwhelmingly happy with the way their carers treat them and with the opportunities to do activities and to try new things. One thing that children / young people were less certain about was how to contact the Commission directly and this will need to be addressed. Almost all of the children / young people said that their carer asks them what they think about the way that they are cared for and that things had changed when they had requested different food or activities.

With regard to the children with a disability home based care service it remains evident that carers and supervising social workers are equipped with the relevant knowledge and training to communicate with the children. For

example, Makaton training is available and simple pictorial images are used in booklets for some children.

As a result of the previous inspection a survey of children / young people's views has been commissioned. The NSPCC has undertaken a very detailed collation and review of the answers that children / young people provided and a draft copy of the subsequent report was shown to the inspection team. Once this report is finalised the authority has undertaken to devise and implement an action plan to address the points that the children & young people have raised.

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

The young people who are beginning to prepare for leaving care cannot feel confident that the authority as a whole co-ordinates the support that they need.

Foster carers in both services can feel confident that the authority has effective systems in place to provide them with the allowances that they are entitled to. Where there are queries or suggestions for improvement they can feel confident that these will be looked at and reviewed by the authority.

EVIDENCE:

As reported at previous inspections, the London Borough of Croydon has a specific leaving care team to help prepare young people for independence. All foster carers with young people of 15/16 years of age and over assist in developing Pathway Plans to ensure that the young people are adequately prepared for leaving care. In some circumstances young people can also continue to live with their foster carers after their 18th birthday in supported care arrangements or receive after care support provided by their foster carers.

During the foster carers meeting with the commission, questionnaires that were received by the Commission and at one of the visits to a carer, concerns were again raised about the leaving care team being poorly staffed and not being able to provide allocated social workers for all of the young people. The foster carers believe that this, as well as other concerns about co-ordination and proper planning and preparation for independence (for example a lack of Pathway Plans) continues to have a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of leaving care strategies.

This concern was raised at the previous inspection and will result in a requirement being made that the authority must take steps to address these concerns with the leaving care team.

(Please note that this standard is not specifically applicable to the children with a disability home based care service)

As a result of the previous inspection it was recommended that the fostering services should verify, at forthcoming social work visits, that all carers are aware of and understand the details about which allowances may be claimed. The general fostering service has addressed this matter. However within the Children with a Disability service, carers were divided equally between those that had no concerns regarding the payment of allowances, and those that had several.

Of those that had concerns there were three main areas identified. Firstly, the regularity of payment; the expectation is that carers are paid monthly, however some carers stated that payments sometimes extended to six weeks, in particular during holiday periods of summer or Christmas.

Secondly, that the sliding scale of payments discriminates against those carers who had children that they have cared for over a longer period.

Thirdly, that the carers had to pay for outings for children from their allowance and that this was prohibitive as children with a disability were restricted in the activities that they could participate in. There is a limited availability to them of play opportunities (such as soft play facilities), which are often expensive or not readily or conveniently located.

These matters were raised with the manager of the children with a disability service, who agreed to look into these issues again. As the manager of this service has agreed to look at these concerns a requirement will not be made on this occasion, however, progress will be monitored by the Commission at the next inspection.

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):

1, 4, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 & 32

The overall day to day management and operation of the services is competent, effective and demonstrates an acute awareness of the ongoing development that is required. There is also a clear commitment to making improvements and the Commission is confident that this ethos will continue.

EVIDENCE:

The London Borough of Croydon Fostering Services have clear statements of the aims and objectives, which were updated in December 2005.

The Children's Guide for the general fostering service contains the necessary information that would be of interest to children and the contact details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The Inspection team were informed that a copy of the Children's Guide has been given to each foster carer and every child subject to their age and understanding. It was recommended at the previous inspection that for both the general and, even more specifically, the Children with a Disability service the children's guides should be expanded upon in other formats and media which would make this accessible to a wider range of children. It is positive to note that further work has been completed and that these guides are more suitable, although for some children with a disability they may not find a guide at all accessible due to their particular communication and communication impairment.

One significant issue of concern to the Commission at the previous inspection was whether there was suitable management provision and oversight about the operation of the general fostering service. Management information is now more clearly and adequately provided and shortfalls in the performance of the statutory functions of the service, for example, foster carer annual reviews and background checks is more effectively identifying the issues that need to be addressed. Due to the continuing expansion of the service the Authority must still be mindful that there needs to be a careful and ongoing evaluation of any increase that may be needed to the operational and management resources. This is to ensure that the improved diligence in the operation and oversight of the services is not adversely affected by the ever increasing demands and even the positive increase in the extent of service that is now offered.

Staff within both the children with a disability team and general fostering services reported that they have regular supervision in line with their experience; a newly qualified social worker received weekly supervision, whilst an experienced worker had supervision every four to six weeks. Supervision sessions are recorded and signed by both parties and a copy available for the social workers. All staff spoken with reported that their respective line managers are supportive, approachable and open to new ideas.

Croydon's foster carers are from diverse backgrounds and Croydon fostering service has improved upon the range of carers that are available. In both of the fostering services all carer reviews were up to date (although two were awaiting an adoption panel meeting and a management decision had been made to review in conjunction with a planned adoption panel meeting). This is a significant improvement on from the 34 carers that were overdue at the time of the previous inspection, and it is positive to note that in the last year that this issue has been fully addressed.

The staff employed are currently adequate to meet the needs of the fostering service. The staff interviewed were positive about the support and training they received and the way the service supports staff, however, all are very mindful of the challenges that the service faces.

The previous inspection highlighted that with the Children with a Disability service, some of the carers were unclear about the support that is provided out of hours, and if they were aware of the service, then they were uncertain as to when they should contact the team. This situation has improved significantly since then and all carers who spoke with the inspection team are aware of the out of hour's service, and could give very clear responses as to when they would need to contact them.

There was a letter written to all carers highlighting the out of hour's service, and there was evidence that the issue is raised at carer's annual reviews. The manager of the Children with a Disability team has also stated that she has had contact with the manager of the out of hour's team, in order to discuss issues that may arise. Clear written guidance has also been provided to the out of hours team about how they should respond to home based carers enquiries or requests for advice and support.

The appraisal system that is used by the London Borough of Croydon is called the 'Job review'. It was required as the result of the previous inspection that both Fostering services must clearly evidence that the annual 'job reviews' are linked to a clear progressive system of staff development and training. Staff members of both services, representatives that were interviewed in the personnel department and managers for the services reported that this area has been addressed and there continues to be support to staff in undertaking post qualification awards in social work.

As reported at previous inspections, all staff have clear written details of the duties and responsibilities expected of them. The policies and procedures of the organisation are contained in overarching policy documents for children services.

The quality of the face to face support to carers from both services supporting social work teams once again received a high degree of praise from carers at both the meeting that was held and from other feedback that was received.

Foster carers files examined previously demonstrated some reluctance in foster carers to attend core training. Both of the Fostering services have since developed an operational strategy that seeks to address foster carers reluctance in some cases to update their training and now make training a clear expectation of new carers.

At the previous inspection many of the home based carers for children with a disability stated that they would benefit from a self help group. At that time

they were unaware that a group had just been initiated and that all respite carers had received personal letters inviting them to the first meeting. This is now much improved and the positive support that is provided by this group attracted many positive comments from carers.

Foster care agreements have improved significantly, with these being seen to be in place in all cases for those that were tackled across both of the services.

Almost without exception, the carers were very positive about the support that they received from the supporting social work teams. The carers had visits and telephone contact, messages were always responded to, and if an issue arose that they needed someone to talk to immediately, then they felt that they could talk to anyone in the teams.

Generally, the carers who have been registered for several years did not feel that they needed as much support from their supporting social worker, but felt nonetheless that they were available to them.

There remains some lack of clarity within the recording about the function and purpose of visits to carers, although this has improved across both services since the previous inspection. As this has clearly improved the Commission will keep this under review to ensure that these improvements continue.

A requirement was made at the last inspection that carers must have a minimum of one unannounced visit per year. This is yet to be actioned fully for the children with a disability home based care service and must be acted upon as it of concern to the Commission. The Commission recognises the logistics of completing unannounced visits for children in placement in the CWD service who receive infrequent care often during weekends and evenings. However, in one example a child had been with a carer for three years, during that period the child had not been since in placement with the carer at all; the social worker had only seen the child and carer together at reviews which were held at the parent's home.

At the previous inspection some foster carers raised the need for more support to be made specifically available for the birth children of foster carers as the lives of these children are also impacted upon by the presence of foster children in their family home. The Inspection team is pleased to be able to report that there is now a system of support for the birth children of foster carers and that the service publicise the nature of this support and its availability.

The degree of information that is kept directly by the fostering services varies considerably. The Inspection team were provided with access to the district

Social Work files of specific children who were randomly selected as a part of the case tracking exercise. The amount of information that was present generally consisted of the required information. The children with a disability service does not use the LAC (Looked after children) documentation format as the vast majority of the children that use this service are in the full care of their birth families. The assessment format that is used continues to be sufficiently detailed and provides all of the necessary information that is required. During last year's inspection, the team were shown a booklet designed from the Child's perspective, which outlines who they are and what they like to do, and the preferences that they have about how they are cared for. This year the inspection team was shown additional work that has been undertaken in this area. The work is two-fold; from the carers perspective which shows a child in photograph format who is in the family and what they like to do. The second part of this work is again in photographs showing a chronology of the events that the child participated in. This document belongs to the child and goes with them to other placements or is a keepsake.

A Total of 11 foster carer files were tracked as a part of this inspection. An auditing system is in place, which is now monitored by administrators who have a specific role to do so. It is evident that this has resulted in significant improvements with only a specific shortfall having been identified (please refer to other areas of this report where specific details are given in regard to CRB checks and updates of annual reviews).

The families of children placed under Regulation 38 (Family and friends as carers) who provided feedback to the Inspection team were again unanimous in feeling supported by the general fostering service. The fostering service points out that family and friend carers are not expected to provide some of the services that other carers do, for example to be on the rota of carers to provide placements out of hours. This results in a lower level of expectation upon them that would otherwise be expected of carers who accept children who are unknown to them as family or friends.

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	2
9	3
15	1
30	3

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	2
29	2

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

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	FS15	27 Schedule 3	All foster carers in the CWD service who have not had a POCA check confirmed as a part of their CRB check must now have one taken up and the fostering service to inform the Commission in writing once this has been achieved.	17/03/06
2	FS22	29 (3)	It is necessary that the CWD service applies the necessary protocol and arrange for at least one annual unannounced visit to foster carers, and more frequent unannounced visits if there are concerns and / or a need to provide additional support and guidance for carers.	17/04/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS8	The Commission strongly recommends that Authority address the issue of haphazard and often inadequate placing social work support. Additionally a greater degree of understanding about the role and function of fostering services should be communicated across the children's

		service s department.
2	FS8	For more generalised placements the general fostering supporting social work team should establish a locally agreed common understanding about the list of matching priorities.
3	FS14	The general fostering service should take steps to address these concerns with the leaving care team about the quality of support that is provided to young people.

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