



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Merton Fostering Services

**Worsfold House
Church Road
Mitcham
Surrey
CR4 3BE**

Lead Inspector
Gavin Thomas

Announced Inspection
5th, 6th, 7th & 8th February 2007 10:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *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	Merton Fostering Services
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Telephone number	020 8545 4286
Fax number	020 8545 4203
Email address	sadi.Atim@merton.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	London Borough of Merton
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Sadi Atim
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 1st February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Merton Fostering Service is a local authority service that provides short and long-term foster placements for children and young people aged from birth to 18 years old.

The service is based in Worsfold House, Mitcham, Surrey. Other services such as health, education, finance, business management and the 16 plus Team are also based at the same address, which is good for promoting effective communication and multi-agency working.

The day-to-day management of the service is the responsibility of the Fostering Manager. In addition to the fostering team, children/young people are well supported by key professionals and other departments such as the Corporate Parenting Officer, Listening to Children's Officer, Nurse, Educational Specialists and the 16 plus Team.

The Aims and Objectives of the service are included in the Statement Of Purpose. Further details about this service may be obtained directly from the Fostering Service.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection took place over a period of four days. The following formed the basis of this inspection:

- A pre-inspection meeting.
- Discussions with the senior management team, Supervising Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officer, Commissioning Officer, Finance Manager, Listening to Children's Officer, Training Officer, LAC Nurse, Education Specialist, Manager for the 16 plus Team & a representative from the CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services).
- Visits to three foster homes (discussions with Foster Carers and children/young people).
- Inspection of various records and documents including pre-inspection records.
- An evaluation of the responses received from Foster Carers & children/young people via questionnaires.
- Feedback meeting with two of the management team.

Questionnaires were distributed to Foster Carers, children/young people and Social Workers. Responses were as follows:

Foster Carers - 19 completed questionnaires were received.

Foster carers made very positive remarks about the quality of service they receive from the fostering team. In particular, their Supervising Social Workers. Foster Carers described the service as being child-focused, well resourced and supportive.

Eight Foster Carers made very specific comments about their dissatisfaction with aspects of the service they receive from the Children Looked After Social Work Team. This includes:

- Lack of information at the start of the placement.
- Inconsistencies within the team.
- Poor communication.
- Lack of support during difficult periods.

Children/young people - 7 completed questionnaires were received.

The seven children/young people made positive comments about their foster placements. This included advice and support on maintaining healthy lifestyles, education, social opportunities and feeling "safe" and "well-cared for".

One young person stated that their Foster Carers are caring people and provide good food. The young person also stated that they feel loved and listened to.

Two children/young people expressed their dissatisfaction with regards to the lack of support they receive from their Social Workers. A summary of the comments made were as follows:

- Cancelled appointments.

- Poor communication.
- Too many Social Workers in a short period of time.
- The Foster Carer is more supportive than the Social Worker with regards to future plans.

Social Workers - 4 completed questionnaires were received.

Comments regarding the service from the Children Looked After Team were discussed with senior management, who in turn will address these comments at corporate level.

The Inspector takes this opportunity in thanking everyone who contributed to this inspection.

What the service does well:

The Fostering Service continues to provide an efficient and effective service. It is committed to ensuring the best outcomes for children/young people and Foster Carers.

The Operations Manager and Fostering Manager are well established in their new posts. It was evident through discussions with staff and Foster Carers that management changes over the last year has not caused any disruption to the running of the service.

Observations from visits to foster homes indicated that overall, the service does well in retaining highly skilled and well-motivated Foster Carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Fostering Manager was of the opinion that improved coordination has been established between the fostering service and the 16 plus Team. As a result, there is a clearer understanding about the roles of different Social Work professionals.

Foster Carers are now liaising directly with the Nurse with regards to health matters.

More emphasis is placed on keeping Foster carers informed of legislative changes via supervisory meetings, briefings at support groups and newsletters.

Specific training on record keeping/recording and child protection matters have been provided to keep Foster Carers abreast of current practices. Policies and procedures have been revised and updated. Where necessary, new policies and procedures have been devised and implemented.

The CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service) facilitates a "Behaviour Management Group" for Foster Carers.

All Foster Carers annual reviews have been undertaken by an Independent Reviewing Officer within the required timescales.

What they could do better:

Overall, the service does very well in applying the criteria as set out in the key National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. A business plan was in place to address any shortfalls identified by the service.

It was noted however, that as for staff, the service must ensure that positive proof of identity including a recent photograph is available for all Foster Carers.

Two recommendations were identified with regards to the Statement of Purpose.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service has partnerships with other key agencies and professionals to further develop health care planning for children/young people.

Foster Carers receive initial and on going training to support them in identifying and addressing children/young people's health needs.

EVIDENCE:

The LAC (Looked After Children's) Nurse provides advice and support on children/young people's health needs and health services. The LAC Nurse works closely with other professionals and departments such as CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, the Education Team and School Nurses.

The LAC Doctor carries out health assessments. The LAC Nurse carries out health reviews with children/young people and when necessary, generates health action plans. Health action plans examined were detailed and subject to periodic review. A flexible approach is taken to carrying out these reviews.

At the time of this inspection, the LAC Nurse was in the process of arranging a presentation for the Social Work team about "Health Care Plans".

The CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service) are very supportive to the Fostering Service, Foster Carers and children/young people. Leaflets are distributed to Foster Carers advising them of the services available from the CAMHS team. This is judged to be good practice.

Some Foster Carers stated in their questionnaires that there are occasions when the children/young people's Social Workers are not forthcoming in providing details about children/young people's health needs at the start of a placement. These comments were addressed with the management team.

Foster Carers spoken to confirmed that children/young people were registered with primary health care services such as a GP, Dentist and Optician.

One Foster Carer confirmed that they are fully supported by the health service with regards to one child/young person who requires intense medical support from various professionals and resources.

Information relating to children/young people's health needs was professionally presented and subject to regular review. Different methods of recording were used in accordance with children/young people's assessed needs. This included different recording strategies for children/young people with disabilities receiving short break services.

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.

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 using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children/young people are placed with Foster Carers who have been assessed as being able to meet the child/young person's needs, ensuring the welfare of the child/young person is safeguarded.

Support services to placements are personalised to the needs of the child/young person e.g. effective matching processes.

Documentary evidence indicated that the Fostering Panel is able to maintain independent scrutiny of the fostering service and challenge the fostering service where appropriate.

Managers, staff and Foster Carers are demonstrably safe and suitable to work with children.

The service works well with the Local safeguarding Board and other agencies to ensure that children are safeguarded.

EVIDENCE:

The Manager is suitably qualified and experienced to ensure the day to day to running of the service. Records examined confirmed that relevant checks as

required under Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001 had been carried out.

The Manager demonstrated good organisational and inter personal skills.

The Inspector visited three foster homes. All homes visited were very clean, comfortable, warm and "homely". The Inspector met with five children/young people. One child/young person showed the Inspector their bedroom and said they were satisfied with the facilities.

Health and safety assessments are carried out prior to Foster Carer's approval. Health and safety matters are monitored regularly and at Foster Carers annual reviews. Records examined confirmed this.

In one home visited, the Foster Carers had adapted the environment to maximise the safety of a child/young person.

Robust matching processes were in place. The fostering team meet on a weekly basis to review placements and referrals. The Fostering Manager reported that the majority of foster placements are planned as opposed to emergency placements. Thorough processes were in place to ensure that where possible, children/young people are placed with in-house Foster Carers. These processes were explained and confirmed by the Manager of the Children's Placements Team. A management system has also been devised to monitor all foster placements.

Where possible, Foster Carers profiles are shared with young people prior to the start of a placement. This is judged to be good practice. It was evident from the three home visits that Foster Carers skills and experience are taken into account when identifying a suitable foster home for children/young people.

Observations in one foster home indicated that the Foster Carers were highly skilled and natural in balancing the diverse needs of the children/young people entrusted to their care. The atmosphere in this home was very "lively" and the children/young people had established very positive relationships with the Foster Carers own family.

The Manager reported that the majority of foster placements are planned. Transcultural and transracial placements are thoroughly explored before the start of the placement to ensure that the placement match is best suited in meeting the needs of the child/young person.

This fostering service has established strong networks with neighbouring authorities. A management system has also been implemented to monitor all foster placements. This is judged to be good practice.

The Manager reported that all exemptions to Foster Carer's approval status are presented to the Fostering Panel for recommendation. The outcomes of exemptions are documented on Foster Carer's files and subject to periodic review.

The majority of Foster Carers who completed questionnaires for the purpose of this inspection stated that there are occasions when they are not given sufficient information about a child/young person at the start of a placement. The fostering service was in the process of devising a checklist for Foster Carers to use at the start of a placement. The checklist will give Foster Carers a list of all the necessary information they are entitled to obtain from the Social Worker about the needs of the child/young person. The draft version of this record was seen and is highly commended.

One Foster Carer explained that they felt unsupported by the child/young person's Social Worker during difficult times and felt that this was an area, which needed to improve. The Foster Carer was of the opinion that matters could have been different if the child/young person's Social Worker had intervened as requested at an earlier stage. Despite this case, which was further explored with the Foster Carer, the Manager confirmed that statistically, the matching of children/young people with foster carers is usually successful and placement disruptions are low.

Robust procedures were in place for safeguarding and protecting children/young people. The Fostering Services has established very positive relationships with other stakeholders' individual professionals to promote children/young people's safety.

All Foster Carers are required to attend training on child protection and safeguarding. Courses on safe caring were included in the training programme for the period 2007/08. The London Borough of Merton's Local Safeguarding Board provides additional training.

Refresher training on bullying has been scheduled for Foster Carers and Social Work in February 2008. The Behaviour and Learning Team will facilitate this training.

All children/young people who completed questionnaires stated that they were not being bullied.

All children/young people are also given information with regards to contacting key personnel if they are unhappy or concerned about any aspect of the care they receive. This includes the details of the "Listening to Children" Manager, the Corporate Parenting Link Person and the complaints department.

Recruitment policies and procedures were in place. Processes were in place for ensuring that recruitment checks are updated periodically for staff and Foster Carers and Staff. Records examined confirmed this. Employment references and other checks are carried out in accordance with the criteria as set out in schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations 2002. However, the Fostering Service must ensure that positive proof of identity including a recent photograph is available for all Foster Carers.

The Fostering Panel was not observed on this occasion. The Fostering Manager confirmed there had been no major changes with regards to panel membership and duties. Prior to this inspection, the service had identified the following shortfalls with regards to panel membership and was actively recruiting to two posts as follows:

- Young person representative.
- Social Worker representative.

The current panel is made up of all female members. The service was mindful that future changes to panel membership should take into account the imbalance with regards to gender representation.

All applicants attending the Fostering Panel are given information about panel members. This includes an option to complete a feedback form about their views on the conduct of the panel. This is judged to be very good practice. This information is used for quality monitoring purposes.

Minutes of recent panel meetings indicated that all cases are thoroughly examined and key matters are addressed and clarified before recommendations are made.

Minutes of panel meetings and associated documents relating to the Fostering Panel were professionally presented.

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.

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 using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service recruits Foster Carers who can meet the diversity needs of the children/young people placed.

The fostering service ensures that all children/young people are supported to do well and to reach their full potential.

Respite provisions for children/young people with disabilities are developing consistently.

EVIDENCE:

Policies and procedures on equality and diversity were in place. These are due to be revised in March 2007. A corporate equality and diversity plan was also in place.

Training on equality and diversity is provided for Foster Carers and staff. Trainers include the Team Manager for Vulnerable Children and the Diversity and Community Engagement Manager.

The Fostering Manager said that Foster Carers attendance for this training was low. The service was in the process of identifying more innovative methods for the delivery of this training to encourage Foster Carer attendance.

One Foster Carer was of the opinion that training on equality and diversity should be facilitated by some one from an ethnic background. This opinion was brought to the attention of the Fostering Manager and Service Manager.

The London Borough of Merton hosts various learning opportunities with regards to equality and diversity including workshops, a wide range of literature and involvement in Black History month.

Equality and diversity topics are discussed with staff at team meetings.

Good systems were in place for addressing and meeting the needs of children/young people with disabilities.

The Inspector met with the Social Work team, who gave the following views on how equality and diversity matters are acknowledged and addressed within the team:

- Children/young people's cultural needs are clearly considered in the matching process.
- An exemption was approved for one Foster Carer who had the relevant skills to meet the needs of a child/young person.
- One Social Worker confirmed that they had recently completed an assessment with couple from an ethnic background.
- The London Borough of Merton strives to ensure that foster placements are made within the best interest of the child/young person.
- Equality and diversity is discussed in team meetings.
- Resources are provided for Foster Carers providing transracial/transcultural placements.
- Very few transracial/transcultural placements have been made within the last year.

The Education Team for Children Looked After also known as "Chances" works very closely with the Fostering Service, Foster Carers and schools to promote good educational outcomes for children/young people. Direct work is also undertaken with children/young people. The Children Looked After Teacher gave very good examples about the types of support and resources available to children/young people. These included:

- Out of school learning activities.
- Resource boxes, which contain learning materials relevant to different key stages.
- Training for Foster Carers.
- Computers are issued via the Corporate Parenting Officer in accordance with the needs of a child/young person.
- Learning opportunities are published in the RAPPORrT magazine.
- Learning opportunities are published on the website www.awayahead.com

- Children/young people's achievements are celebrated throughout the year at various venues and according to age groups.

A business and development plan was in place. Plans for the next year will include:

- Continuous development and review of the "Resource Box" project.
- Research different learning opportunities for children/young people.
- Develop training opportunities for Foster Carers.
- Identify different methods for monitoring children/young people's school attendance.

Foster carers confirmed that they attend school meetings such as PEP (Personal Education Planning) meetings and open days. Foster Carers gave examples of how they support children/young people's education and learning including support when working towards exams and further education/college studies. Foster Carers in two households also confirmed that they ensure that children/young people get to and from school safely.

Tuition is provided for children/young people who are not in school at the SMART Centre, which is based in Merton. Tuition is also provided in foster homes in accordance with a child/young person's assessed needs.

One young person confirmed that they are fully supported by their Foster Carers with regards to achieving a high standard of education. The young person said they intend to progress to University. The Foster Carers said they would support the young person to achieve this goal.

Another child/young person explained that they would contact the Corporate Parenting Officer with regards to resources for an out of school activity.

In one household, it was noted that the Foster Carers had a good range of toys and play equipment to stimulate the children/young people.

The provisions for children/young people with disabilities were not assessed in detail on this occasion. The criteria for the National Minimum Standard 31 were discussed with the Fostering Manager. Respite Foster Carers have been approved to accommodate children/young people with disabilities on weekends.

The Inspector did examine the contents of one file for a child/young person with disabilities. The Outreach Team provides support for children/young people in short break placements. This team is also responsible for generating and reviewing children/young people's care plans and associated documents. The quality of the records examined was exemplary. All records examined gave very clear outcomes for the child/young person and how their assessed needs are met. These records included the following:

- Parental consent forms signed.

- Risk assessments.
- General “needs led” assessment.
- Educational needs and assessment.
- Finances.
- Reviews.
- Care plan.

One Social Worker made very positive comments about one Foster Carer who had demonstrable skills to provide a suitable placement for a child/young person with disabilities.

One Social Worker reported that the Fostering Service has increased the number of respite placements for children/young people with disabilities over the last year.

One of the aims of the Fostering Service over the next year is to continue raising the profile of Foster Carers required to provide respite for children/young people with disabilities.

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.

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

10 & 11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Maintaining and developing family contact are integral to the service provided. Children/young people are encouraged to participate in the planning, management and evaluation of the services and activities.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements are usually established at placement planning meetings and kept under review.

Two Foster Carers confirmed that they actively support contact appointments between children/young people and their birth families. The Fostering Service did not have a consistent approach towards Foster Carers reporting/recording the outcomes of contact meetings. However, the Fostering Manager had identified this as a process, which could be improved upon such as developing a standard form for Foster Carers to complete.

Two foster homes were visited where Foster Carers input was significant with regards to supporting children/young people with contact meetings. Both sets of Foster Carers had developed good communication links with their Supervising Social Workers regarding contact. One Foster Carer did state however, that this was not the same with the children's Social Workers where there were too many changes and inconsistencies within the team.

A workshop on "contact" is provided for Foster Carers. This is also included in the pre approval training.

The London Borough of Merton including the Fostering Service provides a range of opportunities for consulting with children/young people. This includes:

- Direct contact with the Listening to Children's Officer.
- Direct contact with the Corporate Parenting Officer.
- Exit interviews (optional) with the Listening to Children's Officer for young people leaving care.
- Distribution of a newsletter for children/young people entitled "U Foster 2". This is available in two publications. One for under 10's and one for over 10's.
- Statutory review booklets for children/young people to complete. (These booklets are designed for children/young people of different age groups and highly commended).
- Independent advocacy service.
- Consultation events.
- Young peoples forum (age 15 plus) – which meets every six weeks.
- A joint social/consultation event took place with a neighbouring Local Authority.
- Young people are involved in recruitment processes.
- Children's Guide is produced in two versions. One for the younger age group and one for the older age group.
- A young people's handbook is also used. This document is highly commended and includes pre paid cards if children/young people wish to contact the Corporate Parenting Officer, Customer Service Officer or Listening to Children Officer. The handbook also provides practical guidance such as leaflets for young people to record important dates and events.

Children/young people are encouraged and supported to raise complaints if they are concerned about any aspect of their care.

The Listening to Children's Officer said that discussions are currently underway to explore further opportunities for consulting with children under the age of 10. The Listening to Children's Officer also explained that services for consulting with children/young people with disabilities are mainly done directly with parents and/or via the Local Authority's Respite Centre for children with disabilities.

Foster Carers and children/young people raised concerns via the questionnaires about the lack of consultation from the Children's Social Workers. Comments were as follows:

Children/young people.

- My Social Worker does not help me think about my future.
- My Social Worker is not very good. He/she has missed two visits and doesn't telephone.
- One young person stated that they have had three Social Workers in the last nine months. The young person stated that they are never listened to by their Social Worker.

Foster Carers

- One Foster Carer stated that the Social Worker failed to communicate/consult with them or the young person when the young person was exhibiting challenging behaviours. The Foster Carer gave very explicit examples of the breakdown in communication from the Children's Social Worker/team, which did not support a placement, which was breaking down.
- One Foster Carer stated that communication from the Children's Social Work team needs to improve.
- Three Foster Carers stated that Children's Social Workers fail to give them sufficient or accurate information about a child/young person's needs at the start of a placement.
- One Foster Carer stated that a child/young person should not be left too long without an allocated Social Worker.
- Children/young people sometimes get the impression that their Social Workers are not willing to support them.

Two children/young people who completed questionnaires stated that they did not know how to make a complaint.

All children/young people who completed questionnaires stated that they are satisfied with the ways in which they are supported by their Foster Carers. This included consultation on healthy lifestyles, education and recreation.

The above comments were discussed with the management team.

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 using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service has developed good links with other services including the 16 plus Team to ensure young people approaching adulthood are appropriately supported in ways that are tailored to their individual needs, in developing and learning independent skills.

Competitive allowances are paid to Foster Carers. Robust systems were in place for processing Foster Carers allowances.

EVIDENCE:

The 16 plus Team has overall responsibility for coordinating young people's Pathway Plans and transitional arrangements. Training is provided for Foster Carers on "Preparing Young People for Independence". This training is facilitated jointly by the Fostering Team and the 16 plus Team. The Manager of the 16 plus Team reported that an ex-care leaver contributed to the most recent training course, which was carried out in January 2007.

A handbook entitled "The only way is up" is issued to young people leaving care. This document contained a wealth of information about independent living and is highly commended. It also included advice on local facilities and resources.

The 16 plus Team Manager reported that young people are encouraged to sign up to attend a "Pre-tenancy" group for the duration of eight weeks. This group helps to prepare young people for moving on to semi/independent living.

All fostering allowances are processed electronically via the Financial Management Information System. The Finance Team Leader is responsible for processing payments.

Fostering allowances are paid every fortnight via the BACS system.

Foster Carers spoken to confirmed that they had no concerns with regards to the payment of their allowances.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 25 & 32

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The management team is strong, well-qualified and experienced. Managers demonstrably provide good leadership to the staff team. Outcomes of this inspection indicated that Managers are approachable and responsive to feedback while maintaining clear professional boundaries and exercising proper management responsibility.

Staff and Foster Carers demonstrate their commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children/young people.

There are sound policies and strategies for the development and support of kinship carers.

Quality management systems were in place with evidence that these systems are being reviewed and improved upon.

EVIDENCE:

A Statement of Purpose was in place. The overall content of this document was informative and in keeping with the criteria as set out in Standard 1.4 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The section headed "complaints" should include the outcome of any complaints investigated. Although the Director of Children, Schools and families approved the Statement of Purpose in January 2007, this document should also be approved by Elected Members as required under Standard 1.3 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

The Fostering Manager reported that all staff employed in the fostering team are qualified Social Workers with substantial experience in family placement work. The staff team was well established. There was one vacant post at the time of this inspection.

The management and fostering teams are made up of the following staff:

- Service Manager.
- Operations Manager.
- Fostering Manager.
- Assistant Team Manager.
- Publicity Officer
- Five full time Social Workers.
- One part time Social Worker.
- One student Social Worker.
- Panel Administrator.
- Team Administrator.

- Training Officer.

The Inspector met with the fostering team. All Social Workers gave very clear examples of how the service is managed and the different ways in which Foster Carers are supported, trained and supervised. These discussions were consistent with feedback given by Foster Carers in questionnaires and on home visits. Social Workers were also aware of developmental projects and service review as explained by the Fostering Manager and Operations Manager.

Social Workers gave their views on what the Fostering Service has achieved within the last year. Outcomes were as follows:

- The CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service) has increased which is providing a comprehensive support service to Foster Carers.
- The fostering team is reviewing the way in which Form F assessments are conducted to maximise consistency.
- Foster Carers skills and achievements are acknowledged more since the new approach to annual reviews has been introduced.
- There is more emphasis on teenage placements and developing strategies for Foster Carers providing placements for teenagers.
- Foster placements are more sustained with less disruption and placement breakdowns.
- The Fostering Team provides an effective service, which includes stability within the team.

The Inspector can confirm that these views were also consistent with outcomes of discussions with other professionals who are connected with the Fostering Service.

The competencies as set out under Standard 17.6 & 17.7 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Service are well covered in different aspects of assessments, training and professional development days.

The Publicity Officer is responsible for organising campaigns for the recruitment of Foster Carers. A wide range of materials were available for inspection purposes to demonstrate how recruitment campaigns are launched. This included different types of merchandise and literature. Road shows are organised and recruitment is promoted at the Adoption and Fostering Information event.

A Fostering Recruitment and Publicity Strategic plan for the period 2006/07 was in place. This plan was very detailed and comprehensive.

Robust systems were in place for evaluating and delivering the Foster Carer's training programme. A "focus group" has been set up with Foster Carers to review the different types and relevance of training. Courses identified for the future include:

- Stress management.

- Advanced training in safeguarding and child protection.
- Court processes.
- Sex and relationships.

The Training Officer works closely with the fostering team and attends Foster Carer Support Groups to ensure that Foster Carers training needs are monitored and are being met.

The Training Officer is a member of the South England Trainers Group. The Training Officer is also an NVQ Coordinator. Five Foster Carers have achieved the NVQ Level 3 in the Caring for Children and Young People. Three Foster Carers were working towards this qualification.

A register is maintained of all training courses undertaken by Foster Carers. The Training Officer was in the process of devising a Training Profile for each Foster Carer. This should prevent some of the inconsistencies with the way in which training is currently recorded.

The Training Officer was in the process of devising the Foster Carers training programme for the period 2007/08. The training programme for the current period 2007/06 was professionally presented, comprehensive and highly commended. Details for each course included the following:

- Course Design.
- Course Aims.
- Learning Outcomes.
- Trainer details.
- Date/venue.

Foster carers confirmed that where possible, they do take advantage of training and development opportunities.

The Fostering Service provides a good range of opportunities for supporting and consulting with Foster Carers. Foster Carers confirmed this in both the questionnaires and on visits to Foster Carers homes. Foster Carers made very positive comments about the support they receive from their Supervising Social Workers and the team as a whole.

The Fostering Service and other professionals employed by the London Borough of Merton provide a holistic support network to Foster Carers. This includes:

- The Fostering Team.
- Training Officer.
- CAMHS Team.
- CHANCE Team.
- LAC Nurse.
- Outreach Team.
- Listening to Children's Officer.

- Corporate Parenting Officer.

Foster Carers stated that the Out of Office support system is reliable. Foster Carers also stated that they felt confident with the Fostering Team who communicated well with each other and are always able to assist in the absence of their allocated Supervising Social Worker.

Support Groups are held at different times to accommodate Foster Carers commitments as follows:

Weekdays – for task-based Foster Carers, Foster Carers providing long-term placements and kinship carers.

Weekends – Respite Foster Carers.

An Independent Reviewing Officer conducts Foster Carer's annual reviews. The reports for these reviews were judged to be of a very high standard. The outcomes of these reviews included goals for professional development such as training requirements.

The Independent Reviewing Officer confirmed that all Foster Carer annual reviews were up to date.

The information provided in the AQAA (Annual Quality Assurance Assessment) clearly sets out three areas of service provision as follows:

- Aspects of the service, which have done well over the last year.
- Aspects of the service, which could do better.
- Plans for improvements over the next twelve months.

The Fostering Manager was in the process of revising quality assurance and monitoring systems. The Fostering Service hasn't been able to generate effective management information systems due to the delay in setting up the new document management system, which is a borough wide initiative. Progress towards the areas identified for improvement will be monitored at the next inspection.

Some of the positive outcomes for the service over the last twelve months have included the following:

- Stability of the staff team including the appointment of an n Operations Manager and Fostering Manager.
- Good management support.
- The training opportunities for Foster Carers have developed.
- Unannounced visits to Foster homes have increased.
- A flexible approach has been acknowledged for prospective applicants (Foster Carers).

All records and evidence of quality management systems required for inspection purposes were available and maintained to a very high standard. These included:

- Records for children/young people and Foster Carers.
- Foster Carers handbook.
- Details of the Fostering Panel/panel minutes.
- Examples to demonstrate methods of consultation with children/young people.
- Complaints & allegations monitoring.
- Training and development.
- Recruitment & assessment strategies.
- Policies and procedures.
- Records which the service is required to maintain under Schedules 1, 2, 3 & 7 of the Fostering Services regulations 2002.

Appropriate arrangements were in place for the safe storage and archiving of all records maintained by the service.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.	FS15FS15	20 Schedule 1	Positive proof of identity including a recent photograph must be available for all Foster Carers.	30/04/07

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.	FS1	The section in the Statement of Purpose headed "complaints" should include the outcome of any complaints investigated.
2.	FS1	The Statement of Purpose should be formally approved by Elected Members as required under Standard 1.3 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

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