

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

**London Borough of Hillingdon Fostering
Service**

**Fostering & Adoption Service
855 Uxbridge Road
Hayes, Middlesex
UB4 8HZ**

Lead Inspector
Robert
Bond

Announced
19 and 22 September and 7 October 2005

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 Hillingdon Fostering Service

Address Fostering & Adoption Service, 855 Uxbridge Road, Hayes, Middlesex, UB4 8HZ

Telephone number 01895 277852

Fax number 01895 277851

Email address

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

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mrs Marion Rodin

Type of registration Local Authority Fostering Service (LAF)

No. of places registered (if applicable)

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

This is a Local Authority Fostering Service operated by the London Borough of Hillingdon. The service operates from temporary offices in a car park on Uxbridge Road, Hayes, approximately two miles from Uxbridge town centre. Foster carers live throughout the Greater London area and many provide ethnic care to asylum seeking children. Many of these foster carers are in the category of 'families and friends' as opposed to specially recruited professional foster carers. There is also a respite fostering scheme for children with disabilities. Placements are made by a separate team that is under the same overall management. At the time of this inspection, the service had a manager and 12 staff, 75 professional foster carers and 31 approved family and friends carers, and approximately 160 children were placed in fostering settings.

SUMMARY

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

The Inspector visited the offices of The London Borough of Hillingdon's Fostering Service to undertake his inspection on 19th September and 22nd September 2005. He met with the Manager of the Short Term Fostering Team, undertook case tracking on several children's files, examined the files of several foster carers and staff of the section, met with the vice chair of the fostering panel, attended a meeting of the panel, visited and interviewed two foster carers on 6th October 2005, and undertook a postal survey of other foster carers and of social workers who place children with the fostering service.

The Fostering Agency this time has been inspected mainly against what the Commission for Social Care Inspection consider to be the 'key' National Minimum Standards (NMS). Thus 20 out of a possible 32 Standards were assessed. The Inspector considered that 10 outcomes for the standards were fully met, and 10 were partly met. He made 14 requirements, and 3 recommendations.

What the service does well:

The Team Manager considers that the support offered to foster carers is highly regarded and consistent. The service has a diverse group of foster carers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Staff are encouraged to obtain further training.

The foster carers interviewed felt well supported, well trained, consulted over key issues and empowered to make appropriate decisions. They also appreciated the current location of the offices, away from the Civic Centre, and a place where they could easily park their car.

That the service provided good training and support for foster carers was a widely held belief.

The papers provided to foster carers were seen to be of a good standard.

The fostering panel was seen to be well chaired and well administered.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The new manager of the short-term fostering service has now commenced her work.

One set of foster carers reported that whereas in the past their supervising social worker had changed frequently, their current one had remained with them for two years.

The service has begun to allocate 'family and friends' foster carers to supervising social workers so that reviews may be undertaken.

A marketing officer is being used to advise on the recruitment of more foster carers

What they could do better:

The use of locum social workers is not ideal and permanent staff should be recruited if possible. It is recommended that the vacant management post be filled as the lack of auditing of files suggests the service is currently under-managed. It is suggested that the vacant administrative posts are filled as foster carer's files were not always containing the correct child placement details and the registers of foster carers did not always provide the correct terms of approval for fostering. It is recommended that computerised systems in the office are reviewed with a view to creating an integrated system of registers. The computerisation of child and foster carer files is also recommended, particularly as some handwriting is difficult to read.

It is recommended that more attention is paid to the health and educational needs of children placed as the information held on fostering files on these aspects is small.

The fostering panel should be issued with specific terms of reference and the work of the fostering panel should be extended so that they routinely consider: variations to the terms of approval of foster carers; and whether the service has recruited adequate numbers of the correct category of foster carers to meet the needs of the authority.

It may be necessary for the management of the service to recruit more foster carers. The team manager wrote in her self assessment report, 'more placement choice would be desirable'. The training and support for family and friends foster carers should also be enhanced.

The management needs to place a greater emphasis on quality assurance and self-auditing, particularly regarding administrative systems and the payment of allowances to foster carers.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 outcomes for standard(s) 12

The outcome for NMS12 is not fully met for the reason stated below.
Requirement 10.

EVIDENCE:

The Inspector examined the files of three children who had been placed with foster carers. None of the files contained a complete description of the child's needs, and in particular medical information and health needs were missing. The Team Manager reported that health details are not generally kept on the fostering file as they are on the Children's Services main files. She writes in the pre-inspection questionnaire, 'the completion of health assessments is an area that the department as a whole is actively trying to address'. The problem with a lack of information in the correct place is that the foster carers may not be adequately briefed on children's health care needs if their supervising social worker does not have the information on the file they use. See Requirement 10.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

The outcomes for Standards 3, 6, 9 and 15 are fully met.

The outcomes for Standards 8 and 30 are not fully met for the reasons stated below. Requirements 4 to 7.

EVIDENCE:

NMS3: The Registered Manager of the fostering service is the Service Manager for Children's Resources, which covers fostering, adoption, the placement service, and children with disabilities. The person the Inspector met with team manager of short term fostering. Both are appropriately experienced and qualified.

NMS6: The Inspector visited two foster carers in their own homes, and sent out questionnaires to a sample of approved foster carers, half of whom were in the 'family and friends' category. He examined the recruitment, training and supervision records of three foster carers. All appropriate references, and CRB's had been obtained and supervision had been provided.

NMS8: Matching is not done by the fostering team but by the placement team, but they work closely together. The Inspector found that children were placed

outside of the approval categories, for example a couple who were approved for children aged 0 to 2 years, had a slightly older child placed with them in 2004, and a six year old placed in 2005. It was unclear whether the panel had ever been asked to vary their registration. This same file contained conflicting information about whether the couple were approved to take one or two children and the register does not say how many children they are registered to take.

A separate file examined showed that foster carers who were approved to take two children, had had a third placed with them, without their approval being referred back to the panel for consideration of a variation. The Team Manager said if a placement takes foster carers over their approved number, we would change the approval without going back to panel. If a placement is made outside the age range approval, we would wait for the annual review to come around and change the approval then. See Requirement 4

NMS9: Foster carers are trained in abuse and child protection issues.

NMS15: The Inspector examined the files of three employees of the fostering agency. It was demonstrated that appropriate checks and processes had taken place during their recruitment and that they were appropriately qualified.

NMS30: The Inspector met the Vice-Chair of the fostering panel and observed part of a meeting of the panel. He considered the panel to be professionally chaired and administratively supported, and generally operating as intended by the legislation. However the Vice-Chair reported that he was not aware of any 'clear written policies and procedures' for the operation of the fostering panel by NMS 30.1. Those provided to the Inspector by the Team Manager are part of the BAAF Good Practice Guide, as distinct to a specific Hillingdon Council policy. See Requirement 5.

The BAAF Good Practice Guide says that when foster carer's agreed terms of approval have to be varied for a short period in order to meet the requirements of the placement service, the panel should be informed at its next meeting so that it can monitor such variations and request a full report should the variation last for over 6 weeks. The Team Manager reported that this was not happening. See Requirement 6.

The Vice Chair reported that to his knowledge the panel did not 'monitor the range and type of carers available to the authority in comparison with the needs of children' as identified in NMS 30.7. See Requirement 7.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 7, 13, and 31

The outcomes for Standard 7 and 31 are met.

The outcome for Standard 13 is not fully met. Requirement 12.

EVIDENCE:

NMS7: The service has made a point of recruiting carers from diverse ethnic backgrounds in order to meet the needs of young asylum seekers arriving unaccompanied at Heathrow Airport. In respect of disability diversity, the service includes a specialised respite fostering scheme for children with disabilities.

NMS13: As stated in the Staying Healthy section above, the children's files examined by the Inspector did not contain much information, particularly on education and educational needs. The Team Manager reported that this information is kept on the Children Services file. The problem is that foster carers may not be receiving the information they need in order to fully promote educational achievement. See Requirement 12.

NMS31: The service operates a special respite provision for children with disabilities. The Inspector examined a sample file and found it to be of a good standard and that birth parents were appropriately involved in decisions.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 10 and 11

The outcomes for both standards are met.

EVIDENCE:

The Team Manager reported that many fostered children are unaccompanied asylum seekers, but for those who are not, contact is often maintained between fostered children and their natural parents at and via the Council's 'contact centre' facility.

In relation to promoting consultation and seeking children's views and opinions, the Team Manager said she considered this to be primarily part of the role of the children's social worker (not a member of the fostering team) rather than the role of the supervising social worker, who is one of the fostering team.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 29

The outcome for Standard 29 is not fully met for the reasons stated below.
Requirement 13.

EVIDENCE:

Many of the children fostered are young and a preparation for adulthood is not the priority.

NMS29 The Inspector noted that on one file examined there were details of payment of fees going wrong. In addition, one of the foster carer responses the Inspector received to the questionnaires he sent out said; "This year we have experienced several problems with payment of the children's allowances – either wrong amount of days paid, no payment at all, etc., etc." See Requirement 13.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 cares 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 standard(s) 4, 5, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32

The outcomes for Standards 4, 5 and 17 are not fully met and the standard of the management and administration of the service is being jeopardised by keeping essential posts vacant. Requirements 3, 8, and 9.

The outcomes for Standards 21 and 24 are fully met.

The outcomes for Standards 25 and 32 are not fully met for the reasons stated below. Requirements 1, 2, 11 and 14, and Recommendation 3.

EVIDENCE:

NMS4 The Inspector found a substantial number of errors within the record keeping system. The management of the service therefore needs to pay more attention to monitoring and self auditing its business. See Requirement 3.

NMS5 and 17: The Team Manager reported that there are significant gaps in the permanent staffing of the fostering team. There are three social worker vacancies, two of which are filled by locum staff. The use of locum staff is disruptive to foster carers who do not therefore benefit from having consistent supervision. Foster carers complained to the Inspector about the high turnover of social workers in the area teams who deal with the needs of the placed children. Administrative staff are in a team that covers areas other than fostering. There are two vacancies in this team and recruitment is subject to a clearance programme that delays and restricts recruitment to administrative posts. Also one of two assistant team manager posts is vacant as the funding for the post is being used to pay for a locum social worker, according to the Team Manager. Examples of a lack of management time are that the internal system of auditing files had been applied to only one out of six files examined, and a family and friends case was still open to the fostering team some years after it should have been closed. See Requirement 8.

The common practice of the placement team placing children with foster carers outside of their approval number and/or category suggests that the fostering service does not have sufficient carers on its books. See Requirement 9.

NMS21: There is a strategy for working with and supporting carers that is contained in the Foster Carer's Good Practice Handbook (see Buddy System and Support Groups).

NMS24: The Inspector examined the files of three children who had been placed with foster carers. Two were properly constituted files as they were allocated cases, the third was not a proper file as the case was still 'kept on duty'. The Team Manager reported that a proper file would be made up, to include a record of where the placement had been made, once the case was closed to duty. See Recommendation 2.

Case records for fostered children are not comprehensive in that the fostering files only contain limited information on the children, much information being retained on the Children's services main file on the child. Health and education details are examples of this. The computerisation of records should help overcome this difficulty. See Recommendation 2.

NMS25: Children's files examined contained a front sheet to show when and where they had been fostered/placed. These details were not always correct and up to date. The Inspector was provided with four separate computer printouts of registers of 'relative and friends', 'short, long and short asylum', 'children looked after', and 'children placed with LB Hillingdon foster carers'. The Inspector spotted two errors on one of the registers. All four spreadsheets are differently constituted and are not consistent in whether names are listed alphabetically or not. An integrated fully computerised system of record keeping would be better. The file entry on a 'family or friend' carer demonstrated that her register entry was incorrect, there were no minutes on her file from the panel meeting that recommended her approval, no annual reviews of her suitability to continue to be approved had taken place, and there were no notes to show that she had received any contact in the last three years. The Team Manager investigated and found that a 'residence order' had been granted and hence the case should have been closed by the fostering team in 2002. One other file examined contained a completed internal audit check list but the use of this system was not widespread. See Requirements 1, 2, 3, and 11 and Recommendation 3.

NMS32: A substantial number of placements are with 'family and friends' as foster carers and in that sense their contribution is recognised. However the training and support provided to them is much less than to the 'professional' foster carers. See Requirement 14.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

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

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	2
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	X
29	2

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

no

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	25	30	A fostering service provider shall maintain a case record for each foster parent (including approved family and friends foster carers) that meets the requirements of this regulation.	01/01/06
2.	25	31	The fostering service provider shall enter in a register (accurate) details of all foster carers, in a way that meets the requirements of this regulation	01/01/06
3.	4	42	The registered person shall establish and maintain a system for monitoring systems and improving the quality of foster care as required by this regulation and as detailed in Schedule 7 of the regulations.	01/01/06
4.	8	26	The situations in which dispensations or variations may be granted, and the procedure for agreeing dispensations, outside of approved terms of approval of foster carers, must be clarified and the rules formally agreed by the fostering panel.	01/01/06
5.	30	26	NMS 30.1 requires that fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures in order to carry out their functions as described	01/01/06

			in Regulation 26.	
6.	30	26	The panel must always consider applications for variations to the terms of approval of foster carers	01/01/06
7.	30	26 (2c)	The panel must monitor the range and type of carers available to the authority in comparison with the needs of children.	01/01/06
8.	5	19	The fostering service provider must ensure that a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons are employed for the purposes of the fostering service. (This includes managers, social workers and administrative staff).	01/01/06
9.	17	19, and 26 (2c)	The fostering service must take into account the the views of the fostering panel concerning the adequacy of the number and range of approved foster carers, make its own judgement and recruit to the identified gaps.	01/01/06
10.	12	17 (3) (a) and 34 (3) Schedule 6 (1e)	The fostering services children files and details provided to foster carers in their placement agreements must contain sufficient information to enable the supervising social worker and foster carers to fully meet the health needs of fostered children.	01/01/06
11.	25	17	A copy of foster carer training profiles must be kept in all personal files as well as by the foster carers themselves.	01/01/06
12.	13	34 (3) Schedule 6 (1e)	The fostering services children files and details provided in placement plans to foster carers must contain sufficient information to enable the supervising social worker and foster carers to fully meet the educational needs of fostered children.	01/01/06

13.	29	12	The fostering service must review its procedures for assessing and making payments to foster carers in order to ensure prompt and accurate payments to be made..	01/01/06
14.	32	17	The extent of training and support provided to family and friends foster carers must be enhanced and their approval subject to annual reviews.	01/01/06
15.				

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.	6	The existing system for the internal auditing of files should be used on all files as soon as possible.
2.	5 and 17	The current restrictions on recruitment to the fostering team and its administrative team should be lifted.
3.	24	Properly constituted files should be used even when a case is still open to duty and not yet allocated. The computerisation of case files is recommended for ease of reading.
4.	25	The various registers in place should be integrated into one data base.
5.		
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