

# London Borough of Haringey Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC042906
<b>Inspection date</b>	05/08/2011
<b>Inspector</b>	Sue Winson / Jackie Graves
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Social Care Inspection

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	25/01/2008

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

The London Borough of Haringey Fostering service provides planned and emergency foster care for children and young people aged between birth to under 18 years. Children receive individualised placements which are short term or long term. A specialist short break respite service supports children who have a disability. Children also benefit from placement with their family or friends within kinship arrangements. The culturally diverse staff team includes a manager known as the Head of Service, senior team manager, three team managers for the different services provided by fostering service and qualified social workers who supervise the foster carers.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This is a satisfactory service with some good aspects. It is a developing service where some improvements in outcomes for children have been achieved, for example in education, leisure and some aspects of support to foster families. The service has worked to increase foster carer attendance at training, and take up of Training, Support and Development Standards (TDS) with some success. The service has insufficient foster carers and does not fully demonstrate that children's progress and the safety of foster homes is regularly monitored through supervisory and unannounced visits. Behaviour management policies are not clear and do not contain appropriate information, in line with regulations. Allegations of abuse or neglect are not always concluded in a timely manner. The service provides some opportunities for children and foster carers to express their views, and has been responsive in developing groups to meet identified needs, for example, a men's group and a forum for the sons and daughters of foster carers to discuss issues specific to them. Independent visitors have not been provided to all those children who have been identified as needing them. The service's auditing and monitoring systems are not robust enough to demonstrate outcomes for children or to provide information for their improvement agenda.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The actions and recommendations from the last inspection have been largely addressed. Foster carer approval terms are now appropriate, fostering social workers look at daily logs written by foster carers and strategies are in place to recruit foster carers to meet the cultural and diverse needs of all children and young people needing foster care.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children in foster care largely live in environments where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where their care generally meets their individual needs. Foster carers receive training to guide them in promoting healthy lifestyles and those who look after very young children receive appropriate training. A high number of children have health and dental checks. Specialist training to meet the needs of disabled children is provided routinely to family link carers who provide respite placements and their skills are valued by the children's parents.

The local Looked after Children (LAC) nurse visits children and young people in their foster homes to carry out health assessments and provide advice. While there she is able to assess how well their needs are being met. Fostering social workers are not carrying out supervisory visits in line with the fostering service's procedures, nor are the reports of the visits comprehensive. As a result they do not demonstrate that they are monitoring health needs on a regular basis.

The Haringey/Tavistock partnership provides a Child and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to children in foster placement and it is evident that this support is valued by foster carers and contributes to the stability of placements and positive outcomes for children. However, there are delays in accessing services which impacts on children and their carers.

Children generally live in foster homes which provide adequate space to a suitable standard. The service has listened to children's views on having small bedrooms, and taken their views into account when assessing potential foster carers. Health and safety checks, including dog assessments, routinely take place during initial assessments. The fostering service does not consistently carry out annual unannounced inspections on all foster homes to make sure that they continue to meet the needs of children placed.

## Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children say that they feel safe in their foster homes, know how to make a complaint and that the service has listened to and addressed their concerns. Their carers are trained in safe caring practices and safeguarding. The fostering service has started to raise awareness of internet safety through foster carer training. Placing social workers say that the fostering service provides safe and appropriate placements, even in an emergency. Although written risk assessments are not always in place, it is evident that practice serves to protect vulnerable young people, including those who may go missing.

Children are protected by the policies and practices in regard to absence without authority. Protocols are in place and meetings with local police happen where there

are concerns about children's safety. A very small number of children have been missing from foster homes in the last year. The service's behaviour management policy states that it is permissible to restrain children to prevent them going missing from home. There is no evidence of safety guidelines, or training, to protect children who have little or no understanding of risk and danger, such as those on the autistic spectrum.

Checks on foster carers and people in their household largely protect children. Delays in Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks and a lack of assessment of new partners in foster homes where children are placed, were picked up by the fostering panel and social workers have been asked to provide more information.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Children and young people enjoy positive relationships with their foster carers and commented that they are treated, 'like their own daughter' and as 'one of the family'. Children benefit from largely stable placements and foster carers receive training and support to manage their behaviour, including a twelve week course to develop their understanding of trauma and behavioural issues. Foster families reported significant support which has improved the behaviour of children in their care and relationships within the home.

Education is well promoted and children are supported to attend and achieve. They and their foster carers receive a range of support through the virtual school and the special educational needs service, which is tailored to individual needs and benefits children. For example, support is routinely provided when children are starting school and at the stage of transfer to secondary school and young people are assisted to find appropriate college courses. Professionals and foster carers advocate on children's behalf to ensure they have appropriate education and support while in school. Leisure activities are encouraged and children benefit from being able to develop their interests and skills. Fostering households are stimulating and encourage pre-school learning and education in its wider sense.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is satisfactory.

There are a range of opportunities for children in foster care to express their views, and they do so. They are given information about their rights to complain. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) see children on their own and foster carers were positive about how well children are consulted. The local authority has an online service for children's comments and the fostering service runs groups to ascertain their views. Foster carers own sons and daughters benefit from groups which address their needs. Changes have been made as a result of listening to children. The fostering services does not routinely invite the views of parents of children in foster care. Consultation with foster carers has developed, and there is an

active foster care association. Foster carers' views of the service are gathered at various stages, however, there is no analysis of responses to guide the improvement agenda.

Children are encouraged to develop positive self view, emotional resilience and understanding of their background. Foster carers receive training on life story work and keep memory boxes and mementos for when children move on. Contact is well promoted and children benefit from their carers having an understanding of the position of parents and empathy towards them. Preparation and ongoing training is effective in helping foster carers understand the importance of contact for children. Examples were given where contact arrangements are being managed in a very natural way by foster carers, where siblings are not placed together. Kinship carers are supported to manage the complexities of contact in ways which benefit children. The service is aware of issues where, directed by the court, contact is continuing to the detriment of children; this is being addressed through the legal department.

The extent to which children move into and leave foster homes in a planned and sensitive manner is variable. Some children have the benefit of seeing photographs and receiving information about their foster carers beforehand while others do not. Foster carers know what is good practice in moving children on and transferring attachments.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people in foster care are supported and encouraged to develop skills for life and further education and work is promoted. They and their foster carers are involved in compiling and implementing pathway and transition plans. Foster carers receive training and the leaving care social workers regularly attend support groups to update them on changes in regulations and expectations. There is facility for some children to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday in order to maintain stability.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Some examples were seen where children receive individualised care to meet their holistic needs. The short breaks scheme provides a commitment to providing enjoyable short breaks for children with disabilities. People are encouraged to request information in different languages or in Braille or audio formats. Not all children who have been identified as needing an independent person who they can contact, have been provided with one.

The fostering service has insufficient foster carers to meet the needs of children in the borough. The recruitment and assessment team have access to a designated marketing and publicity officer and works in partnership with other local authorities

to raise awareness about fostering within the community and to recruit carers. Their website contains appropriate and non-discriminatory information. The use of independent fostering agency placements, many of which are close by, increase placement choice to some degree. The service is aware of the shortfall and recruitment is ongoing. Assessments are carried out by qualified and experienced workers. As mentioned earlier, full assessments are not always carried out on all adults in the fostering households. Annual reviews are chaired by an independent reviewing officer and all first reviews are presented to the fostering panel.

The fostering panels and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) make appropriate recommendations and decisions, and have a role in quality assurance of the service. The panels members have a range of relevant experience and panels are child-focussed and challenging. The service has begun a re-organisation of the panels to provide independent chairs and ensure that delays in panel meetings do not continue to impact on children. Applicants are assessed on their suitability and ability to meet the needs of children and young people.

Full preparation training is provided for all applicants, delivered by the service's learning and development manager alongside foster carers. The fostering service has worked to increase the take-up of ongoing foster carer training, with some success. On line training has been welcomed by some foster carers who find it difficult to attend courses. Workshops to assist people to complete TDS have been well attended. Preparation training is thorough and clearly prepares people for the tasks of fostering. There is a range of on-going training and facilities for specialist training to meet the needs of specific children. Different times and venues have been tried to increase attendance. Foster carers' views on training is variable, some finding courses useful and informative while others find them not relevant. The service has started work with foster carers about their changing role under the new NMS, but as yet this has not included children's social workers. Support groups are ongoing and include specific groups for men, boys in foster care and the sons and daughters of foster carers. An active local foster care association provides support and regular newsletters are produced to keep foster carers informed.

Foster carers receive support and supervisory visits, however, the latter are not happening at the frequency laid down in the fostering service's procedures. Full details of supervisory visits are not recorded so the service cannot demonstrate that outcomes for children are being monitored on a regular basis. Foster carers reported visits being often cancelled, but were positive about the support their own children receive. Some commented about the lack of facilities for them to have respite.

The fostering service's operation largely meets the aims and objectives in its Statement of Purpose.

Staff files do not all contain the required information, so the service cannot demonstrate robust recruitment. Full employment histories, two written references and proof of identity were not held on all staff files. Staff say that they are well supported and supervised by their line managers and they have access to in house training. Issues about the capacity and workloads of the fostering teams is being addressed through re-organisation. At present, fostering social workers do not

always attend placement agreement meetings, statutory reviews and core group meetings. There have been some delays in allocating support workers to newly approved foster carers.

The senior management team meet regularly with the staff. The systems for auditing and monitoring are not robust enough to identify areas for development and drive forward planning. Information is gathered through a range of feedback methods and questionnaires, but no analysis of the information is evident. Social workers commented on the delays in decision making which impacts on children, and sometimes leads to them sitting in social work offices for long periods before a foster placement is agreed and identified. There have been considerable delays in the investigations of complaints and allegations, some of which have taken over a year to resolve. Strategic planning to ensure that children receive the range of services they need, through partnership working, is not evident. Statistics provided about outcomes for children were largely for LAC children in general, rather than those in foster care.

Foster carer and children's files are held electronically with appropriate safeguards in place to ensure confidentiality is maintained. The offices used by the fostering service are adequate. Difficulties reported due to the recent reduced administrative support, including late payments to foster carers are being resolved. Foster carers know the allowances that they can claim, but say they do not always do so, due to the bureaucracy and delays in processing and payments.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Recommendations**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of children (NMS 10.5)
- prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster carers (breach of Regulation 13(1))
- prepare and implement a written procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect and to provide for written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response (breach of Regulation 12)
- ensure that children have access to independent advice and support from adults they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns, which is appropriate to their age and understanding (NMS 1.5)
- ensure that the fostering service recruits, assesses and supports a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children they provide care for (NMS 13)

- ensure that there is careful selection of staff and fostering households and there is monitoring of such people (NMS 19)
- ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. (NMS 25)