

# Manchester Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC045099
<b>Inspection date</b>	23/09/2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Sarah Oldham
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Wenlock Way Offices, 5th Floor, Wenlock Way, West Gorton, Lancashire, M12 5DR
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 274 6287
<b>Email</b>	ciaran.rafferty@notes.manchester.gov.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Manchester Children, Families and Social Care
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	21/09/2007

---

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

## 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

Manchester Children and Families and Social Care provides the fostering service for the City of Manchester. The fostering service offers emergency out of hour placements, short-term, long-term and permanent placements for children and young people who are 'Looked After' by the local authority. There is also a Disabled Children's Family Placement Team that provides short-term placements via the short break and multi link service for families where there is a child with a disability. The service also provides for family and friend carers. An additional service of Support Workers is available and these workers support foster carers and children and young people placed.

The Fostering service is situated in the Gorton area of Manchester in a single office site and is accessible to people with disabilities. The service is in an area that is serviced by good public transport route.

Manchester Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, approval and support of foster carers. Although family and friend carers are assessed initially by social workers based in the area teams, the comprehensive assessments are completed by the family placement workers.

The fostering service is divided into five teams. The teams are Recruitment and Assessment, Duty and Support, Long Term Fostering, Disabled Children's Family Placement and Support Workers team. Each team has its own designated team manager with responsibility for the management of the team. There is a Principle Manager who is responsible for the overall fostering service.

## Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This announced inspection was carried out over five days and included a review of all the key National Minimum Standards (NMS).

Following the last inspection the service has been subject to a number of changes at all levels, to improve services for children and young people.

The development of the initial duty team has enabled a consistent approach to finding placements for children and young people, and district social workers to have named workers to discuss the placement required. The matching process is safe and clear documentation is completed. Links have been further developed with the Looked After Children (LAC) nurse team to ensure that they are aware of when a child has moved placement, this has increased the overall number of LAC health care

assessments to be completed within required timescales. The authority is developing the education services to include a designated post for Looked After Children to ensure that they have access to appropriate educational facilities. The service has experienced managers in post and although some are currently within acting roles, they have been in post for some time, enabling a consistent management team to be formed. Staff feel that they are effectively managed and supported. The profile of the service has been raised within the authority and good links have been developed with district social work teams.

The service has developed some policies and procedures but is aware that ongoing development work is required to ensure that children and young people are effectively supported and safeguarded at all times.

This includes ongoing training for carers, further recruitment of staff to ensure that there are adequate numbers to effectively support carers and the monitoring of external placements.

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

The service has responded to the previous report and actions raised in a constructive and positive manner. Additional funding was initially provided to increase the number of staff to the service and this funding is ongoing.

The development of a new system for the duty and support team ensures that there is a consistent response made to all referrals and this has been positively commented on by placing and supervising social workers.

The updating of policies and procedures for staff and carers has enabled the service to focus on better outcomes for children and young people. The service has undertaken an audit of all foster carer files to ensure that appropriate paperwork is in place to accurately reflect the approval status of the carers. This is to ensure that no young person is placed with a carer that is not approved to care for them.

Links between the fostering service and the district social work teams have developed to ensure that the role of the family placement team is raised.

Staff feel that the management team are supportive and approachable with a good understanding of the issue of family placement. However, staff remain concerned regarding the high caseloads that they continue to carry.

The recruitment of an independent reviewing officer has enabled a consistent level of foster carer reviews to commence with clear timescales in place for issues and actions raised to be addressed.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Health care assessments for children and young people have increased over the past 12 months. Designated LAC (Looked After Children) nurses are continuing to promote the health care needs of young people and have greater access to current information about the placements of children and young people. Children's statutory reviews and foster carer reviews undertaken are ensuring that health care needs for children and young people are discussed and appropriate plans are in place to meet those needs.

In most cases, foster carers are receiving the appropriate LAC documentation, including medical consent. However, some carers have not received all parts of the required documentation. Supervising social workers are addressing this as part of the ongoing supervision provided to carers and where ongoing issues are identified this is acted upon by senior managers. This is to ensure that there is a consistent level of documentation provided to carers to enable them to meet the needs of the children and young people placed with them.

A medication policy has been developed and agreed. This will be made available to all carers, providing information about prescribed and non prescribed medication. Recording systems for the administration of medication vary and it is envisaged that this policy and procedure will address this. Specialist training is provided to carers providing care and support to young people with complex health care needs. The children with disabilities team is a multi agency team and support regarding health care is available from the community nurse linked with this team.

Foster carers have a foster carer report book to record information relating to the young people in placement, including their health care needs. However, there is not a consistent level of recording and specific training for this has not been undertaken.

Training with regards promoting health care for foster children is provided to all carers as part of the initial foster carer training. Carers also have access to additional health care training including first aid, although some carers say that they would like additional training and support with specific health care needs.

Young people spoken to and those that responded to Ofsted questionnaires say that they are supported well with their health care needs and feel that their carers look after them when they are ill or feel unwell.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

A selection of staff files, including managers, were inspected. These contained relevant and appropriate information to ensure that staff appointed to work for the service have the necessary skills, experience and qualifications. All necessary checks

were in place prior to staff commencing employment.

Foster carers met on this inspection were found to be providing a satisfactory standard of care for the children and young people placed with them. The homes provided appropriate facilities and young people were encouraged and supported to personalise their own rooms. Health and safety checks for carers have been updated along with detailed safe care policies, personalised to individual families and young people placed with them. All young people who responded to the surveys indicated that they were satisfied with their placements and that they felt safe.

The arrangement for placement of children and young people has been reviewed to ensure that there is a consistent matching procedure and process in place. This has ensured that children and young people are placed appropriately. A dedicated team take all referrals for placements and this has enabled a consistent response to all requests for placements. In most cases, carers have received appropriate paperwork and documentation regarding the young person placed. Where this has not been the case there are systems in place to ensure that action is taken to address this, including referring through to district team managers. Managers and fostering supervising social workers feel that the matching and placement of children and young people has improved and that placements are safe and appropriate.

The authority still has a significant number of external placements in independent fostering agencies. To address this the local authority are ensuring that the recruitment for carers is ongoing. There is a recruitment team that undertakes the initial assessments following applications from prospective carers. Full assessments for prospective foster carers are comprehensive and detailed. Some of the assessments are outsourced due to the volume, however, the team manager for the recruitment and assessment team retains responsibility to ensure that assessments completed meet the agreed standard.

The authority has a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has good links with the family placement service via the managers. Procedures are in place for referrals to be made from the teams regarding any issues of safe care. All referrals made are appropriate and there is a good consultation process in place. The service has responded appropriately to all recent allegations against carers. The process for allegations against carers has been updated and provides a comprehensive system to ensure that complaints are acted upon. The service has a system in place to monitor allegations and complaints about carers.

Carers have access to child protection and safe care training. Although training is not mandatory, it is discussed in depth at foster carers annual reviews and an expectation is that carers will attend 'core' training. Some carers felt that there had been a lack of training in the past year although discussion with the training officer identified that safeguarding training was regularly available and attended by carers.

The service has a designated member of staff who is currently updating and re-writing policies and procedures to ensure that the service provides clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for staff and carers. A number of policies

have already been completed including child protection, safe care and behaviour management. All new policies are sent to all carers to ensure that they have consistent and up to date information.

The panel is chaired robustly by an experienced social work practitioner, with good attention to detail. A panel steering group meets regularly and the panel chair felt that there was a genuine understanding within children's service of the needs and issues facing family placement. Regular meetings take place between the panel chair and the assistant director of children's services to discuss any issues that may arise from panel meetings.

Carers who had been to Panel felt that they had been treated with courtesy and the panel process had been explained to them.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

The service is continuing to recruit a wide range of carers to meet the high levels of demands within the authority.

The service has appropriate policies and procedures in place in respect of ensuring that the needs of children who are disabled or have specific religious and cultural needs are met. Carers and staff have access to training and additional resources. There is a designated children with disabilities team who have good links with multi agency workers to ensure that appropriate support is provided to carers and young people.

The number of children with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) has increased over the past year, however, not all young people have a PEP. The authority have established a lead education role for the inclusion of children and young people and a post who will take the lead for all looked after children. These two roles are responsible for the monitoring and progress of all looked after children including attendance, admissions and exclusions of young people.

The overall educational outcomes for children and young people have improved and educational progress and achievements are monitored closely. Foster carers say that they are encouraged to maintain good links with school to support children with their educational needs.

Children and young people are supported to access activities to support them to develop their social skills. The authority provides leisure passes to young people to enable them to access a variety of recreational facilities.

The service also has a short break scheme and multi link foster carers scheme to provide support and care to children and young people with complex needs. Prospective carers are subject to the same recruitment, assessment and approval process as main stream carers. The carers seen on this occasion were providing a good service to children and their families.



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

The provision is satisfactory.

Details of contact arrangements are clearly documented on individual children and young peoples files. Contact arrangements are, in the main, known to carers and they are aware of the importance of contact and the impact that this has on young people. This is discussed at initial training and also as part of the supervision process. It is also documented within individual children's LAC reviews and foster carers reviews. However, when there has been an amendment to contact arrangements for a young person, this is not always effectively communicated to foster carers.

The service has a designated children's rights service that supports young people to ensure that their views are heard. The service ensures that all young people have information and access to this service.

The appointment of a permanent Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to undertake foster care reviews has ensured that all foster carers reviews undertaken since the appointment are consistent and comprehensive. Any issues identified at the reviews are recorded and timescales for actions are made. There are processes in place to follow these actions to ensure that they have been addressed. The independent reviewing officer meets regularly with senior management within the authority to discuss any concerns or issues that have arisen at reviews that require addressing. However, the number of independent reviewing officers does not adequately ensure that all placements, including those children placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) are robustly monitored.

Young people say that in general they feel able to contribute effectively to their reviews although there is an inconsistent approach for young people to contribute to their foster carers review.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

The service has over the last 12 months developed a supported lodgings service that is linked to and managed by a fostering manager. The supported lodging scheme enables young people to live with approved supported lodging carers to enable them to further develop their independent living skills within a safe environment. Pathway plans are in place and set out clearly the needs of the young people and how those needs will be met.

The leaving care service is provided by Barnardos and young people who are aged 15 and a half are provided with a leaving care service pack which enables young people and foster carers to access appropriate services. Information is provided to carers regarding the leaving care service as part of the

induction to fostering.

Manchester pay the Government recommended rates to carers and details of payment levels are provided to carers. However, some carers say that allowances are not always clear to understand and are not always made on time in relation to additional payments, for example, clothing. The service does not have strong systems in place to identify when there has been an overpayment to carers and how that overpayment will be rectified.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and updated to clearly define the role of the fostering service, the aims and objectives and meets the National Minimum Standards. It provides suitable information for carers, parents and other users of the service. The children's guide is bright and appropriate for the ages of the children placed. Further development of the children's guide is planned for children with limited communication.

The foster carers handbook contains some out of date information and has not been updated for a number of years.

The service is managed by an acting principle manager and five managers, three of whom are in an acting role. The principle manager has significant experience and expertise in family placement. The service has recently undergone a review and the outcome of this is yet to be made available. This is causing some concern amongst the staff teams.

Following the previous inspection, the service has undertaken a firm commitment to improving the service to ensure outcomes for young people are good. As a result of this, senior management within the authority meet on a regular basis with councillors to discuss progress made within the service. This has effectively raised the overall profile of the family placement service.

Staff are supported through regular supervision, training, team meetings and annual appraisals.

The service continues to have a high number of children and young people placed with independent fostering agencies. The service does not have enough carers to meet the demand for placement. However, matching systems in place ensure that matches made are appropriate.

The recruitment strategy continues to ensure that there are good levels of initial enquires. These are now being processed in a more effective manner, with initial screening of applicants taking place within a week. Assessments of carers are completed within appropriate timescales and submission of papers to panel are of a good standard.

The service continues to have a number of staff within acting roles and there are still a number of agency staff in place. The service improvement plan has now finished and the outcome of this is due shortly. Family placement staff continue to have high numbers of cases due to the number of carers approved within the service.

Foster carers receive regular, structured supervision within appropriate timescales and copies of supervision notes are provided to carers. Most carers confirmed that they received regular visits from supervising social workers and felt that in general the support provided to them was good.

Training for foster carers is available, although some carers have not undertaken updated training. Other carers commented that training is not readily available and they are unclear about what training there is. Foster carer support groups are being used to provide a basis for training by supervising social workers on the Foster Care Regulations and the National Minimum Standards. The service has provided a publication about the Regulations and Standards to all foster carers to enable them to have a greater understanding of the current legislation and standards.

Assessments for family and friend carers are undertaken by a specific assessment team. Family and friend carers have access to training, support and supervision. A support group has been developed specifically for this group of carers to enable them to address specific issues. Carers say that this has been a positive step for them.

The majority of records for carers' files, young people's files and administrative records are appropriate and well organised. However, some of the files had relevant papers missing including review minutes, personal education plans and up to date foster carer agreements, although visits are recorded and carer supervision records are in place.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### 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.

Std.	Action	Due date
12	ensure all carers are aware of the arrangements for giving consent to medical treatment and have clear information and practice guidelines (Regulation 17 (3)(b))	30/10/2008
17	ensure that the service has a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the service (Regulation 19 (a)(b))	20/11/2008

## Recommendations

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

- develop a system and provide guidance to consistently record medication prescribed and administered (NMS 12.6)
- ensure the carer receives clear information about the allowances and expences payable and repayable and how to access them (NMS 29.2)
- ensure that all young people have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that is kept under review (NMS 13.2)
- ensure that the number of Independent Reviewing Officers is sufficient to ensure that the placements of young people with Independent Fostering Agencies are monitored effectively (NMS 11.3)
- ensure that any amendments to contact arrangements are made known to carers (10.2)
- ensure that the foster carer handbook contain details that accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose (NMS 1.6)
- ensure that the fostering service staff have manageable number of allocated cases to enable them to effectively meet the needs of the fostering service (NMS 17.2)