

# Fostering Services (RBKC)

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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<b>Setting address</b>	Kensington & Chelsea Citizens Advice Bureau Service, 140 Ladbroke Grove, LONDON, W10 5ND
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7598 4506
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Anne Marie Carrie
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	24/09/2007

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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 Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea provides a recruitment, assessment, support and supervision service for foster carers, for their diverse range of children. Children's needs are met through both short and long term placements and short breaks for children with disabilities. Children also benefit from kinship care with relatives and friends.

The fostering team is based within a Social Services office in Ladbroke Grove, directly opposite the underground station. A range of social work teams are based in the building, which promotes good partnership working. The fostering team consists of a team manager, practice manager, 11 social work posts, a duty and placements officer, recruitment officer and business support posts.

At the time of this inspection there were 92 approved fostering households, to meet the needs of children aged 0 to 18.

## **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The purpose of this announced inspection is to ensure that the fostering service continues to promote good outcomes for children. This inspection specifically concentrates on children with disabilities and those living within kinship care. The key standards were examined. These include Standards 12, 3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30, 7, 13, 31, 10, 11, 1, 16, 17, 21, 24 and 25, along with Standard 20 which concentrates on staff supervision.

The fostering service delivers an excellent service. Children and foster carers receive outstanding outcomes in the areas of being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and the overall organisational management. The outcome area relating to safety, additionally promotes good outcomes. Foster carers greatly appreciate the support and professionalism of the service.

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

Children benefit from a new fostering strategy and support scheme which targets the needs of older children. Better links with the placements officer and independent fostering agencies ensures more stable placements. The increase in consultation enables children and foster carers to directly influence policy.

Foster carers benefit from a more detailed induction and broader range of training opportunities. The fostering service provides good value for money, being able to

reduce their fixed costs. The undertaking of checks on panel members, assists with the safeguarding of children. The review of several policies and the annual review form also contributes to a more efficient system.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service promotes excellent outcomes for children. Children's care plans detail their specific health needs. Children receive support from specialist health professionals, these include a Looked After Children (LAC) nurse, clinical psychologist and substance misuse practitioner. Close working relationships ensures that children receive their annual medicals, regular dental checks and immunisations.

Children receive additional support from the Children with Disabilities Behaviour and Family Support Team. This multidisciplinary team comprises of clinical psychologists, speech and language therapists and an occupational therapist. Assessments, intervention, consultation and practical advice is available to assist children with learning disabilities, emotional, behavioural or mental health needs.

Children benefit from a new sexual relationships and education policy. This document incorporates an opening statement by a child and children's views are an important part of this policy. The local authority places great emphasis on the ability of this document to further enhance young people's health. Support mechanisms includes foster carers training and children's access to specialist advice.

Foster carers receive a range of training which promotes children's physical and emotional wellbeing. First aid training is mandatory. Individualised training is available to inform foster carers of a child's particular health diagnosis. Foster carers monitor and recognise the changes in children's health, responding appropriately to concerns.

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

The provision is good.

Children receive care from a culturally diverse range of foster carers. The fostering service have access to experienced foster carers who have built up a range of expertise. Foster carers demonstrate a commitment to providing comfortable, nurturing, child focused placements. Children usually have their own room and annual health and safety checks ensure the accommodation meets their needs.

The fostering service promotes and safeguards the health and safety of children. Each fostering household has an individualised safer homes agreement. Various policies, training and documentation inform foster carers. Their annual review also addresses health and safety and safer caring issues. Foster carers receive access to departmental child protection and the safeguarding board training. The managing behaviour and advanced parenting course identifies appropriate forms of restraint.

Clear procedures outline how to respond to bullying and if a child is missing from home. Foster carers receive additional support if a child goes missing from an outreach service. Children benefit from a selection of comprehensive child protection policies which safeguards them from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Children benefit from placements which assist them in developing a positive understanding of their heritage. The matching procedures endeavour to ensure that children receive care within a similar racial, religious and linguistic background. The fostering service has a diverse range of carers who are reflective of the local community. Matching forms detail the child's ideal carer. Foster carers profiles highlight their cultural background, experience and strengths. The fostering service recognises the need to continuously improve in this area. Cross cultural training, information and support is available, which assists in delivering the best possible care.

The fostering panel focuses on ensuring good quality decisions secure the future of the borough's children. The fostering panel has an independent Chair and includes expertise from health, education, a young person with experience of the care system and a foster carer. Panel membership includes various cultural groups, however it is not fully reflective of the local community. Panel members have the opportunity to attend a variety of training and receive invitations to foster carers events. Managers, staff, foster carers and panel members undergo a thorough recruitment procedure. This process ensures they have the necessary experience, skills and qualifications to work with children.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Valuing diversity and promoting equality is an inherent part of the fostering service. Foster carers assessments, agreements, supervision, training and annual reviews continually addresses this area. Children also benefit from the training staff and panel members receive. The fostering service has a range of initiatives and financial support to meet the diverse needs of children. Interpreters are available and information is translated as necessary. Foster carers and social workers work co-operatively to enhance the child's confidence and identity. There is great creative use of life story work, resulting in children producing their own DVDs. Policies and practices address children's religious and spiritual needs. Foster carers positively support young people with their emerging sexuality.

The fostering service encourages young people to develop their skills, talents and maximise their potential. A very substantial budget is readily available, to enhance children's life chances. This funds a range of activities and equipment including bikes, electrical equipment, long haul flights, English as a second language tuition, swimming, drama and driving lessons. The borough is additionally recruiting an activities co-ordinator to further meet the needs of children in their care.

The service highly prioritises children's educational needs. Increased budgets enables the funding of course materials, individual tuition and school trips. Children's educational attainment continues to rise favourably compared to the national average. The Looked After Children Education (LACE) team provides training and support for foster carers, staff and teachers. This includes relevant training and the producing of a regular newsletter. The Placement Support Group and LAC support and Reviewing Team also work towards achieving better educational outcomes for children. The latter includes three teachers and a specialist education support officer.

Children particularly benefit from the provision of computers and information technology equipment. Foster carers have access to on-line education courses, some being linked to supporting children. A welfare monitoring system assists in tracking school absences. The Extended Schools Strategy, recruitment of a virtual head teacher and the mentoring scheme further contribute to children's education support needs.

Multidisciplinary working enables the provision of an effective short break service. Parents remain central to the promotion of the child's everyday needs. Parents enjoy the flexibility of the service and children thrive within the shared care arrangement. Specialist training, professional planning and foster carers' commitment ensures good outcomes for children. The short break service continues to develop. The fostering service is working in partnership with a neighbouring borough to provide carers for children with disabilities.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children receive support and encouragement to maintain appropriate contact with relatives and friends. Clear contact procedures and foster carer training ensures the protection of children. The ability to facilitate contact determines whether placements are made and forms part of the foster carer review. Specialist venues and contact supervisors provide a safe setting for children. Good reporting enables the monitoring of the strengths and concerns surrounding each contact. Foster carers and contact supervisors are skilfully able to monitor the effects on each child. Financial support and transport costs ensures contact happens.

Children have the opportunity to proactively influence policy and practices. A range of creative consultation processes place children at the heart of decision making. An effective Corporate Parenting Panel meets on a quarterly basis. Prior to the introduction of new procedures and legislation, children are able to voice their opinions. The service equips children with the necessary information to enable them to understand departmental working. They regularly produce a Looked After Children newsletter and the Listening to Children's Officer organises various events.

Children contribute to the foster carers' annual review. There are also plans for their

participation in the recruitment and training of foster carers. The service recognises the need to involve foster carers' birth children and organises activities specifically for them.

The service acknowledges the need to produce information in a youth orientated manner. Minutes for meetings are visually stimulating, with clearer language. DVD recordings with hip hop soundtracks also assist with capturing children's views.

Children receive support and encouragement to express their complaints. The service sensitively handles children's complaints and respond promptly to concerns. Senior management take personal interest in these matters and may meet face to face with children.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Children benefit from everyone working together to ensure a smooth transition into adulthood and independence. Policies determine the nature of support and foster carers receive specialist training in this area. A specific Independence Support Team takes responsibility for children's needs. The team actively involve children in making decisions concerning their future. Children assist in the producing of their pathway plans, which details their individual needs. Foster carers assist children emotionally and with practical skills including cooking, daily living and budgeting.

The Independent Support Team effectively works with foster carers, supervising social workers and other services. All parties demonstrate a commitment to ensuring children receive positive outcomes. The borough prides itself on treating all children equally, regardless of their immigration status. Foster carers receive financial support which enables placements to continue after children reach 18. Children receive a leaflet detailing their entitlements. A budget is available for young people to purchase the items needed to set up their new home. In addition to any items needed to continue their education.

The borough recognises the need to provide children with additional skills in preparation for adulthood. The 'Teenagers to Work' scheme enables children to gain work experience during the summer. The forthcoming mentoring scheme will assist children with their personal development.

Foster carers promptly receive competitive allowances, which exceed recommended Fostering Network rates. The fees and allowance guidance clearly details the financial support available. The service meets children's initial needs by providing start up equipment and related allowances. The provision of smoke alarms and fire blankets assist with promoting children's safety. The service acknowledges the specific skills to care for children with disabilities and pay an enhanced rate. The fostering service pay financial rewards for completing National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training. Bonuses are also payable for long service, loyalty and



recommending a friend.

## Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose clearly details the aims and objectives of the fostering service. These values correspond to departmental goals and legislative guidance. Children receive a comprehensive handbook which explains the system and outlines their rights and expectations. The Children's Services Directory additionally lists information on the various services in the area.

The fostering service endeavours to deliver an efficient and effective service. Managers within the service have the appropriate skills and qualifications. Management roles are clear and all levels of staff feel valued. There is a well defined business strategy and team learning and development plan. Current systems work well to enable the prioritising and monitoring of workloads.

Children's best interests forms the basis of partnership working. Fostering social workers have individual links to locality teams and attend their team meetings. The holding of placement support groups assists in promoting stable placements. The fostering service's involvement within the North West London consortium enables the pooling of resources to meet the needs of a larger percentage of children. Quality assurance systems ensures continuous service improvement. The timing of the annual fostering report however, does not enable the swift influencing of the team action plan.

Staff training and support contributes to the delivering of good outcomes for children. Fostering staff receive a thorough induction and regular individual supervision. Staff benefit from ongoing training which combines professional development and legislative changes. Acting up arrangements, secondments and specific mentoring schemes provide opportunities for career progression. The working practices of fostering staff successfully balances children's and foster carer's needs.

The current foster carer's recruitment strategy focuses on finding homes for teenage children. The fostering service aims to introduce a specialist service with additional support packages for older children with more challenging needs. Plans are also in place to return Kensington and Chelsea children from placements in Kent. Placements in the independent sector are subject to good contractual arrangements and are a means of securing long term security for children.

Foster carers benefit from a range of support which helps them fulfil their role. Foster carers qualify for assistance with housing and securing community resources. A 24 hour helpline provides out of hours advice. Foster carers receive proactive structured supervision which focuses on their practical and developmental needs. A comprehensive training programme is available, which includes National Vocational

Qualification (NVQ) training. Foster carers are able to attend monthly support groups. Having the choice of an afternoon or evening meeting, within the borough or in Harrow. Baby sitting allowances enable their attendance. Foster carer's children also have access to their own support group. The service circulates information via a quarterly newsletter. A foster carers' forum assists with the consultation process.

Regular events enable foster carers to interact socially. These include a spa day, summer outing, Mayor's reception and an end of year party. Invitations extend to foster carers' families. Foster carers receive special packages at leisure centres. This enables them to swim for free and obtain reduced gym membership. The fostering service enjoys personally acknowledging foster carers. This includes the celebration of life events, individual awards and recognition.

The fostering service will be able to access the children's computerised files, using the fully integrated information technology system. The fostering service keep separate records for staff, foster carers, complaints and allegations. Staff and foster carers ensure the secure storing of records. Policies outline case recording and confidentiality to ensure the appropriate maintaining of records.

Kinship care procedures outline the management of placements with families and friends. The fostering service has a commitment to developing kinship care. The service wishes to provide opportunities for specialist support and training. The recruitment of a Kinship Co-ordinator is in progress. Kinship carers report great satisfaction with the service they currently receive. The fostering service is instrumental in developing the support for kinship carers on a wider level with the North West London consortium.