

# London Borough of Ealing Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC042826
<b>Inspection date</b>	03/03/2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Paula Eaton
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Setting address</b>	London Borough of Ealing, Perceval House, 14-16 Uxbridge Road, LONDON, W5 2HL
<b>Telephone number</b>	0208 825 6084
<b>Email</b>	sheikhg@ealing.gov.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	London Borough of Ealing
<b>Registered manager</b>	Ghazala Sheikh
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Ghazala Sheikh
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	04/12/2006

---

© 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

Ealing fostering currently has approximately 175 fostering households with over 220 approved places for children and young people. The service consists of four teams, the recruitment and assessment team, fostering support team, family link service and kinship fostering team. The type of placements provided include short to long term, mother and baby, kinship and bridging placements as well as short break placements.

The service is situated in the main council buildings in the centre of Ealing. The service has access to the health and education teams within this building.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was a key announced inspection that looked at all the key National Minimum Standards. Economic well-being was also judged during this inspection even though there are no key standards under this outcome heading as evidence was provided regarding how the service meets this outcome for children and young people.

There has only been one action and one recommendation made as a result of this inspection. The action relates to ensuring that checks are renewed for foster carers and staff at the required intervals and the recommendation relates to staff signing and dating records in foster carers files. Ealing fostering continues to provide an outstanding service. The continual improvements and developments made by the service demonstrate the management's commitment to providing good quality foster care for looked after children. Foster carers are motivated and committed to meeting the needs of the children and young people in their care and demonstrate a good understanding of the difficulties faced by looked after children.

The service has sound administration, recording and monitoring systems in place and good staff support mechanisms. There are clear lines of accountability and good training opportunities for staff and foster carers.

The service is creative and dynamic in the way it consults and engages children and young people and is outstanding in its approach to encouraging, supporting and inspiring looked after children and young people to enable them to live fulfilling lives and reach their potential.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the previous inspection it was found that not all child protection strategy meetings were being reported to the regulatory body. Records demonstrate that this is now occurring.

A recommendation was made regarding the use of sessional workers, this matter has also been addressed.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Excellent systems are in place to ensure that the health needs of children and young people are met and a healthy lifestyle promoted. The service has strong links with healthcare professionals including a looked after children's nurse, psychologist, drug and alcohol advisory service and a paediatrician. The looked after children's nurse carries out statutory health assessments and foster carers are aware of their responsibilities with regard to meeting the health needs of children and young people. For example, foster carers ensure that children and young people attend regular dental check ups and have regular eye tests and also respond appropriately to health issues children and young people may be facing. They also maintain appropriate records of health issues and appointments attended so that this information can be reviewed and plans changed for children and young people where necessary.

Written guidance is provided to foster carers on meeting the health needs of children and young people and comprehensive training is provided on a range of health related topics. For example, training is provided on first aid, promoting the health and well-being of looked after children and self harm. There is also training available on child development and workshops on sexual health and drug and alcohol awareness. The psychologist also provides one to one and group sessions for foster carers, children and young people and is available for consultation for both foster carers and staff.

Young people can access health information from a variety of sources that demonstrates the services commitment to reaching as many looked after children and young people as possible in a way that they can relate to. For example, the Horizons resource centre for young people uses creative ways of educating young people about healthy living such as inviting a contestant from the television programme Master Chef to run a cooking session which young people enjoyed. Young people can also be allocated mentors who they can discuss issues with on a one to one basis and they can also access written material about health matters.

The service has good monitoring systems in place to assess if the health needs of looked after children and young people are being met. This allows the service to identify any gaps in provision and implement plans to address these gaps. For

example, the service has implemented a 'Reality Baby Programme' where a computerised doll has been used to demonstrate the reality of looking after a small baby to adolescent girls in conjunction with sexual health and relationship education to try and reduce teenage pregnancies.

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

The provision is good.

Robust systems are in place for the recruitment of staff that include verification of references, renewal of Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks at appropriate intervals and clear records are maintained and monitoring systems in place. However, occasionally CRB checks and medical checks are not renewed on time but close monitoring of records ensures that these oversights are addressed promptly once identified. The service employs skilled staff and supports them to develop in areas where they have less experience. Qualified social workers carry out assessments of prospective foster carers and they are given training and supported to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to complete this task.

Children and young people are placed with foster carers who have been thoroughly assessed and can provide a safe and comfortable environment for them. An annual health and safety assessment of foster carers' homes is carried out and any issues identified are followed up to ensure that any risk to the health and safety of children and young people is promptly responded to. The Foster Carer's Handbook provides guidance to foster carers on health and safety matters and the preparation training for foster carers also covers health and safety matters.

Children and young people are carefully matched to foster carers so that their needs can be met and to help prevent placements breaking down. The service has excellent systems in place to identify any gaps in the matching process. For example, a comprehensive form is completed where a trans-racial match is made that identifies any gaps and how these gaps are going to be addressed. One foster carer demonstrated how she had been linked with another carer who had the same religious beliefs as the young person placed with her and said that this foster carer took the young person to church and provided her with information about the young person's faith. Also, the service takes a very individual approach when making placements and listens to the views of young people and where possible introduces them to foster carers prior to them being placed.

Foster carers are provided with clear guidance regarding safer caring issues and training is also provided on child protection and safe caring issues for foster carers and staff. Robust child protection policies and procedures are in place and allegations are responded to promptly and appropriately. Foster carers are well informed and understand what forms of behaviour management are acceptable and clear written information is given in more than one format to reinforce that corporal punishment is not acceptable under any circumstances. Foster carers respond to behaviour in a constructive manner that supports children and young people to manage the

difficulties they are facing and find alternative ways to express their feelings.

Anti bullying training and guidance is provided for foster carers and the service has introduced a course for foster carers on Cyber bullying to ensure that foster carers are aware of how children and young people are being bullied using technology so that they can monitor and deal with these issues. The service has procedures in place for when a child or young person goes missing and foster carers are clear about the action they should take if a child or young person in their care is missing. Risk assessments are completed for young people who are known to abscond to try and minimise the risk that this poses to individual young people.

The fostering panel is well managed and effective. The panel consists of individuals with a wide range of knowledge and experience that includes children's health and education. There are clear procedures in place for the panel and the panel fulfils its quality assurance function ensuring a high standard of assessment is maintained at all times. Foster carers and social work staff understand the function of the panel and feel that constructive comments are made by panel members.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Excellent systems are in place to ensure that the individual needs of children and young people are considered and the service strives to meet these needs wherever possible. Recruitment campaigns are developed to target specific groups in the local community to enable the service to meet the cultural, religious and linguistic needs of specific children and young people. The Foster Carer's Handbook provides guidance on different cultures and training is also provided for foster carers and staff on valuing diversity. Where there are gaps in the matching process the service has good systems in place to link foster carers with other foster carers who can support them and the child or young person in their care. Young people's views are also considered in the decision making process.

Foster carers encourage children and young people to have new experiences and try new activities encouraging a sense of achievement and self worth and the service supports this by agreeing funding and supporting foster carers when required. For example, children and young people have been supported to learn to play musical instruments, join drama classes and take up horse riding.

Specific training and support is also available to support foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people with disabilities. This includes training on communication methods and Autism and community nurses are also available to provide specific training to enable foster carers to care for individual children and young people with specific needs such as Gastronomy feeding.

Guidance is provided to foster carers on all aspects of educational development. Educational needs are included as part of children and young people's placement

plans and progress is monitored during supervising social worker visits and during placement reviews. Foster carers are clear about the expectations with regard to meeting the educational needs of the children and young people in their care and The Foster Carer's Handbook provides practical tips on preparing children and young people for school. Children and young people are provided with quiet space to study in foster carer's homes and the service has an excellent resource, Horizons, where children and young people can go for educational support. There are sessions run by qualified teaching staff to support children and young people at all stages of their education and children and young people have access to books and computer equipment at the centre.

Young people also have access to mentors at the Horizons centre and educational trips are organised for the children and young people who use the service. The service celebrates the achievements of children and young people and encourages them to learn. For example, the service has a 'Chatterbox Programme' that encourages young children to read and has involved children visiting the Roald Dahl museum. Also, there is a 'Rising Stars' programme that recognises the achievements and talents of children and young people and an award ceremony where the Mayor of Ealing presents awards to children and young people for their individual achievements.

The service provides a short breaks service that is tailored to meet the specific needs of parents caring for a child or young person with disabilities. This involves a sitting service as well as a family link service where foster carers provide care for the children and young people. The service also offers a short breaks service for foster carers which enables foster carers to have a break from placements where children and young people have complex and challenging needs.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The service has excellent facilities that promote and facilitate contact. For example, the service has its own contact centre and provides staff to supervise contact where required. Foster carers are supported to help children and young people maintain relationships with their families and understand the importance of this. The service prepares foster carers for the difficulties that may be faced when trying to maintain relationships between children and young people and their families. This includes observation and monitoring changes in behaviour of children and young people and responding to difficult situations with birth parents.

The service strives to ensure that children and young people and foster carers are listened to and have the opportunity to express their views and contribute ideas to the running of the service. Feedback forms are given to children and young people to complete prior to reviews taking place and events are held where children and young people are encouraged to express their views and are able to speak to members of staff from the department.



Young people are also actively involved in the Corporate Parenting Panel and have provided invaluable input to this function to effect change in the service. For example, they have changed the way the service consults with children and young people. The Horizons centre is also a valuable resource that encourages and supports young people to constructively explore their feelings about the care they receive and the way they are treated and express this positively to achieve a positive outcome. The centre has mentors who are ex care leavers themselves and therefore can identify with the issues that looked after children and young people may be facing. The service is looking to improve consultation further by introducing a website for children and young people that will provide additional support for children and young people placed out of the borough.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The system in place for the payment of allowances to foster carers promotes and encourages foster carers to attend training and participate in other aspects of the fostering service. There is a three tier system that foster carers progress through depending on their training and commitment to the fostering service. Foster carers are supportive of this system and a consultation process took place before its introduction. Foster carers are clear about how the allowance should be used to meet the needs of children and young people.

Excellent systems are in place to support young people preparing for adulthood. There is a yearly training programme that focuses on independent living skills and the service has access to outreach workers who assess the skills a young person has and where they need support. The service ensures that young people are as prepared as possible before moving them into independent living accommodation and there is a staged process for those young people who need extra support. The service has a supported lodgings service that enables young people to stay in a family setting until they are ready to live independently and this works well for young people who want to remain in education and are settled with foster carers. The service also supports young people to access accommodation if they are going to university and foster carers are given guidance on how to support young people and prepare them for independent living.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose is in place and is reviewed and updated regularly to reflect changes in the service. There is also a good Children's Guide in place that contains information about being looked after and includes contact details for external agencies that can support children and young people and information on

how to make a complaint.

The service has a clear management and staffing structure that ensures there are clear lines of accountability throughout the service. Staff receive support from qualified and experienced managers who are available on a formal and informal basis to discuss all aspects of their role and their workload. There are excellent systems in place to monitor workloads and ensure that there are sufficient staff to meet the needs of the service. Good monitoring systems are also in place to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews are managed effectively. Good administrative support systems are in place and the service has ample computer equipment to meet the needs of the service.

The service steadily recruits foster carers through advertising and word of mouth at a pace that ensures standards are maintained. The service carries out comprehensive assessments of prospective foster carers that cover all areas of competency needed to ascertain if an individual is suitable to become a foster carer. Foster carers understand the reasons behind the depth of the assessment and appreciate that this process helps them to reflect on their past experiences and how this may impact on them caring for a looked after child.

Clear systems are in place for working with and supporting foster carers. They are given a comprehensive Foster Carer's Handbook that they find helpful as a reference guide and have access to regular support groups. Foster carers receive annual reviews and reports are prepared and presented to the fostering panel as required. The service provides 24 hour support for foster carers and foster carers feel they can approach the service any time they have a query or concern. Foster carers receive regular visits from their supervising social workers and written records of these visits are maintained so that any issues can be followed up.

There is a comprehensive ongoing training programme in place for foster carers that helps ensure they are adequately equipped to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. Foster carers take part in three days pre-approval training that informs them about what the fostering task entails and explores their views and attitudes. Further training is provided on a wide range of topics including parenting, child development, childcare legislation, anti bullying, attachment separation and loss, caring for children and young people who have been abused, child protection, equality and diversity, first aid, health and safety, life story work, managing challenging behaviour and understanding teenagers. Other workshops are also provided and include information on dealing with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, family learning and fun with food. Foster carers are also supported to complete National Vocational Qualifications.

The service changes and develops the training programme to meet the training needs of foster carers and any changes in legislation and promotes the professional role that foster carers play in meeting the needs of vulnerable looked after children and young people.

A detailed secure record is maintained of each child's and young person's life as a

looked after child. Foster carers are clear about the expectations regarding keeping records and can demonstrate how they are recording memories as a part of life story work for children and young people, for example, taking photographs and keeping souvenirs from trips and activities.

Robust administration systems are in place for the maintenance of all records. All records are kept securely and maintained to a high standard. Regular audits of records and recording systems take place to ensure that records are kept up to date and in order. Records are not always dated and signed.

The service has developed a kinship care team that is responsible for assessing and supporting all family and friends approved as carers for children and young people. This team provides the same level of support for these carers as is provided for foster carers and has included the introduction of specific support groups for kinship carers and working with other London boroughs regarding the possibility of providing joint training for these carers to meet their specific needs.

## 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
3	ensure that recruitment checks such as Criminal Record Bureau checks and medical checks are renewed for all staff and foster carers as required (Regulation 20(3)(d))	30/04/2008

### Recommendations

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

- ensure staff sign and date all recordings (NMS 25)