

London Borough of Waltham Forest Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC042414
Inspection date	23/09/2008
Inspector	Karen Malcolm / Joanna Heller
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	1c The Drive, LONDON, E17 3BN
------------------------	-------------------------------

Telephone number	020 8496 2437
Email	Barbara.Foster@walthamforest.gov.uk
Registered person	London Borough of Waltham Forest
Registered manager	Barbara Foster
Responsible individual	
Date of last inspection	05/02/2007

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: 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

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 aim of the London Borough of Waltham Forest's fostering service is to provide a quality fostering service to meet the needs of the diverse local community. They are committed to the provision of a range of placements and placement choice. Fostering services include task centred (short term), shared care/respice, preadoptive and permanent placements and placements with friends and family for children between birth to 18 years who are looked after by the local authority under the Children Act 1989. Where the needs of children and young people cannot be met from within the local authority fostering service, provision is commissioned from independent fostering agencies. These agencies are monitored by the Access to Resources Team and also through arrangements made within the Pan London Agreement, (this is an organisation comprising the London Boroughs who have come together to negotiate contracts and organise monitoring of children's services provided by the independent sector). The London Borough of Waltham Forest embraces diversity and difference in all aspects of its work and strives to provide foster carers who reflect the racial mix of the local community.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

The purpose of the announced inspection was to assess the service against key National Minimum Standards and gauge the service's success in addressing issues highlighted at the last inspection which was undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

Overall, The London Borough of Waltham Forest Fostering Service is judged to be satisfactory. The fostering service has maintained effective systems for consulting with children, young people and foster carers and has access to a proactive Children's Rights Service. The fostering service has a good fostering panel that is organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people in foster care. Children and young people are able to maintain contact with their families and the service has a proactive Foster Carers' Association.

The current registered fostering manager is leaving the service, however, an appointment has been made for a manager to act up until a permanent appointment is made. Both managers assisted the inspectors throughout the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection there were nine actions and six recommendations of which eight actions and all six recommendations were met. The actions relate to trans-racial and matching of placements, assessment to be completed for all live-in partners, ensuring good links with children's social workers and records of supervisory visits and personal records are accurately maintained. Additional to this kinship care cases are to be presented to panel within acceptable timescales. One action was not fully met and this relates to recruitment checks.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensures that before a placement begins, foster carers are provided with as full a description as possible of the health needs of a child or young person with clear procedures governing consent to receive medical treatment. The foster carer is provided with a written health record for each child or young person placed in their care; this is updated during the placement and moves with the child and young person. Depending upon age and understanding, the child or young person has access to and understands the health record kept by the fostering service. Each foster carer is given basic training on health and hygiene issues and first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion. Foster Carer's Handbook covers all areas of healthcare such as medication information, health assessments, hospitalization, serious accidents and illness, registration with a GP, dentist and optician, timetable of routine childhood immunisations, nutrition and exercise, sexual health, drugs, alcohol, mental health first aid, hygiene and universal infection control and death of a foster child.

Foster carers spoken to said that they 'have a good support network' in place to help them with any advice and support they need around individual children or young people placed with them, and 'the support from the supervising social worker or any member in the team is also good'. There is a good on-call and out of hours support which is known to all foster carers. Foster carers also said they 'mainly use this service for additional support and advice or when a crisis occurs, which is not often'. The fostering service has good links with health agencies such as Children, Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and within CAMHS there is a fast tracking system for foster carers to access when a crisis occurs or they need additional support or advice.

The fostering service provides specialist foster care for young people from the ages of 10 to 16 who have complex needs, where their behaviour can be challenging and their life experiences have prevented them from forming positive relationships. At present there are two foster carers on the scheme. The fostering service has been promoting this service to approve more foster carers on to the scheme.

The fostering service is proactive and recognises that healthcare is not only related to the children and young people being looked after. All foster carers once approved

are given a free leisure pass to enable them to access any of the leisure facilities within borough.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering manager was approved by the CSCI. The fostering manager has a clear, objective approach on ensuring safeguards and promoting the welfare of children and young people is high on the service's agenda and this was evident throughout the inspection. The fostering manager informed the inspectors prior to the inspection that she was leaving the post, however an acting manager had been appointed. Both managers assisted the inspectors throughout the inspection.

The fostering service ensures all foster carers provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment, prior to being approved by the service. Annually health and safety checks are undertaken by the fostering service to ensure that the needs of the foster children and young people remain safely accommodated or when any issues arise. Foster carers' home visited were found to be reasonably safe and comfortable. Children and young people spoken to said they 'called this home'. Each child or young person placed has her/his own bed and accommodation arrangements reflect the child or young person's assessed need for privacy and space or for any specific need resulting from a disability. The foster carer's preparation and training cover health and safety issues and the foster carers are provided with written guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. A part of the independent reviewing officer role is to ensure areas of safeguarding are being maintained.

The fostering service ensures that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a foster carer capable of meeting their individual assessed needs. Since the last inspection this has been an improvement. Part of the preparation training undertaken by foster carers emphasises trans-racial placements and what this means for the foster carer and the child or young person being placed. Where trans-racial placements are made, foster families are provided with additional training, support and information. This is to enable the child or young person to be provided with the best possible care and to develop a positive understanding of their heritage. Children and young people interviewed stated that they are happy and well supported by their carer. Although the ethos of the fostering service is to ensure that trans-racial placements have additional support when needed, it was highlighted at the panel meeting that this was not consistently managed in one case by the supervising social worker.

The Protection of Children Act (PoCA) was not fully implemented by the fostering service, with regards to a serious safeguarding issue. This was highlighted by the inspectors during the inspection and a referral to PoCA was made by the registered fostering manager straightaway. The fostering service does protect each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation. Training for foster carers includes caring for a child or young person who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing challenging behaviour, recognizing signs of abuse and

maintaining the child or young person's self-esteem.

All foster carers work from the safer caring guidelines produced by the Fostering Networks. Each placement is suitably assessed and if a placement is deemed unsafe this is re-assessed and appropriate action is taken to safeguard the child or young person. Management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. This information is regularly monitored by the registered fostering manager. All foster carers and staff regularly undertake child protection training which is in line with the local authority's own procedures. All notifications are submitted to Ofsted within the allocated time and there is a clear bullying policy which is in line with education.

There are clear procedures for vetting of staff that are undertaken by the fostering service. Staff, foster carers and other professionals who work in or for the fostering service are vetted, managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation. However, not all recruitment checks were fully checked such as records of individual's identification (ID) information.

The fostering service has clear guidance in place with regards to exemption approval for foster carers. However, it was identified that there were a number of foster carers with exemption approvals in place but these were not consistently reviewed to ensure that the children and young people remain appropriately accommodated and safe within the foster carer's household.

The fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions. The panel chair is fairly new and has a vast amount of experiences in fostering. The meeting was quorate and the panel minutes viewed showed that appropriate discussions had taken place and appropriate recommendations had been made. The fostering panel is a culturally diverse team of individuals with expertise from education and child health. The suitability of all panel members is checked prior to their appointment and Criminal Records Bureau checks (CRB) are reviewed every three years.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality. The fostering service ensures that their foster carers provide care which respects and preserves each child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. Foster carer's preparation and compulsory training cover this. Throughout the assessments and supervisory visits, equalities and diversity are assessed. The fostering service recognises that some foster carers may need additional support and this is provided.

The fostering service ensures that their foster carers give each child or young person encouragement and equal access to opportunities to develop and pursue their talents, interests and hobbies. This is set out in the information provided to foster carers. Disabled children and young people are provided with services and support which enable them to access as wide a range of activities as is possible for them.

Foster carers and the fostering service give a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person placed. Foster carers contribute to the assessment of the child or young person's educational needs and progress. Each child and young person has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and this is updated regularly to ensure individual goals and aspirations are being met. The foster carers provide an environment in which education and learning are valued and this is evident in the achievements timetable of care leavers and visiting foster carers in their homes. Additional support is given by the fostering service when children and young people's school placement are outside the location of the foster carer's home. The foster carer's placement agreement identifies where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including school uniform, school trips and school equipment.

The fostering service is looking at increasing the number of short-term break foster carers by aiming their recruitment campaign to those who can undertake this specialist caring. However, when foster care is provided as a short-term break, the fostering service recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child or young person.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are clear procedures setting out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child or young person in foster carer are to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed. Foster carers are aware of the emotional impact on the child or young person and ensure that this is recorded and this is shared with the supervisory social worker. The views of children and young people are taken into account and given weight in determining whether contact arrangements should be reviewed. Foster carers are given training and appropriate support is also given to help with children and young people maintaining appropriate contact. Financial support is provided to foster carers to ensure contact takes place at the appropriate times. The fostering service has a contact room on site which is appropriately equipped with surveillance cameras and age appropriate activities.

Children and young people's opinions and those of their families are sought by the fostering service regularly. The fostering service has good links with the local Children's Rights team. The Children's Rights team gives help, support and advice to children from the age of seven and they are also involved in recruitment campaign for foster carers, the preparation groups, training for foster carers and annual reviews. The remit of the Children's Rights team is to obtain children and young people's views on the service being provided. The Children's Rights team are also involved in the process preparing young people to leave care, this is carried out at

least three times a year by the service with all care leavers. Children and young people in foster care know how to raise any concerns or complaints, and the fostering service ensures that all complaints or concerns raised receive prompt feedback.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Foster carers receive training and support to enable them to provide effective support and guidance to a young person preparing to move into independent or semi-independent living. The fostering service ensures that each young person preparing to move to independent or semi-independent living is consulted about their future and encouraged to be actively involved in the decision making processes and implementation of the Pathway Plan.

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually. There is a written policy on fostering allowances. This and the current allowance levels are well publicised. The foster carer receives clear information about the allowances and expenses payable and how to access them before a child or young person is placed. The foster carers spoken to were clear about how the allowance should be used and said that they received their payments promptly.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The Statement of Purpose clearly sets out what services are provided for children and young people who are placed by the fostering service. This is reviewed, updated and modified when and where necessary and at least annually. The service has two Children's Guides, one aimed at younger children and one for young people. Both guides were in an appropriate, colourful booklet format and young people had been involved in the design of these guides with the support of the Children's Rights Service. The Children's Guides contain information regarding social workers, foster carers, education, review meetings, complaints, contact and young people's rights.

The fostering service is part of the North East London Fostering Consortium which is a multi agency consortium composed of seven fostering agencies working together to secure the successful delivery of outcomes for children and young people through coordination of service, shared training and recruitment events and developing good practice.

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance. The service has proper financial procedures and there is a reviewing procedure to keep them up to date.

There is a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability. The levels of management delegation and responsibility are clearly defined and are appropriate for the skills, qualifications and experience of the relevant members of staff. Staff are organised and managed effectively. There are adequate numbers of staff working for the service and support systems are available for foster carers. Staff policies encourage retention of salaried staff. The fostering service has a recruitment policy and strategy aimed at recruiting a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

There are clear details of the duties and responsibilities expected of staff within each of the teams. All receive regular, planned supervision and appraisal from their line managers. The staff spoken to during the inspection said that they receive regular, professional supervision and that ongoing training is provided. There is a clear plan for training and development of all staff involved in fostering work, induction, post-qualifying and in-service training. The fostering service has a number of practice teachers who support student social workers through their placements.

The role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the workers and the foster carer. Annual review reports are prepared and are available to the fostering panel. There is a good system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker. However, records did not clearly show when unannounced inspections took place and when there is a transitional change with regards to a supervising social worker.

Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker and has access to adequate social work and other professional support. The supervising social worker ensures each foster carer they supervise is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all standards, policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service. However, it was evident that exemption approvals were not consistently reviewed or monitored and appropriate support for foster carers was not fully addressed by the supervising social workers to ensure that the foster carers and children placed were both fully safeguarded.

On approval all foster carers are given a copy of the service's Foster Carer's Handbook which is very detailed and comprehensive and contains a wealth of information regarding services available, policies and procedures, practical guidance, expectations and useful contacts. All foster carers have foster care agreements and the fostering service ensures that the agreements contain the information they need to know. However, foster carers on the specialist fostering scheme do not have clear agreements on the expectations of their roles and responsibilities.

The fostering service has a good training package in place, which highlights the core training that individuals need. The fostering service also has a named training and information officer who takes the lead on the training for foster carers. A number of young people who are trained in children's rights also participate on the training for foster carers, which is deemed very positive. Local venues are used and lunch, childcare and parking expenses are offered. However, where specialist training is needed for a foster carer to support children and young people in their care, this is

not clearly reviewed or monitored by the service.

The fostering service has an active Foster Carer’s Association that mainly takes the lead on organising social activities and events. The association meets regularly to enable foster carers to have more of a voice in service's development.

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of their life events. All relevant information from the case records is made available to the child or young person and to anyone involved in their care.

The fostering service’s administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the service and as required by regulations. Confidential records are stored securely at all times and there is a clear policy on access and retention of records. Records of complaints and allegations are clearly recorded, as are conclusions reached and action taken.

The fostering service policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by, and the particular needs of, family and friends as carers. This part of the service has expanded since the last inspection and a number of kinship carers have been approved.

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
9	ensure any safeguarding issue that relates to a foster carer being de-registered must be reported to PoCA. (Regulation 12)	30/11/2008
15	ensure all staff ID checks regarding recruitment are on file. (Regulation 5, 7,20 Schedule 1)	30/11/2008
30	ensure all exemption approvals are reviewed appropriately. (Regulation 29)	30/11/2008
22	ensure that foster carers receive appropriate support when the needs of the child/young person change, and this must be recorded clearly. (Regulation 35)	30/11/2008
23	ensure that all foster carers are able to access appropriate training to support the needs of the children and young people placed with them. (Regulation 17)	30/11/2008

Recommendations

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

- have a separate foster carers agreement for those foster carers under the 'specialist team' which clearly outlines the expectation of the fostering service and the carer. (NMS22)
- have at least one supervisory visit as unannounced. (NMS22)
- include in the Foster Carer's Handbook clear transitional guidance as to when there is a change of supervising social worker and how this is managed. (NMS22)