

London Borough of Brent Childrens Services Placement

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC042630
Inspection date	05/10/2009
Inspector	Muhammed Harunur Rashid / Sandra Jacobs-Walls
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	London Borough of Brent, Placement Service, Triangle House, 328-330 High Road, WEMBLEY, Middlesex, HA9 6AZ
Telephone number	020 8937 4558
Email	
Registered person	London Borough of Brent
Registered manager	Naima Khan
Responsible individual	Naima Khan
Date of last inspection	01/07/2008

© Crown copyright 2009

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 London Borough of Brent fostering service works in collaboration with the area children's social work teams to ensure welfare of children placed in foster care. The fostering service also works closely with other professionals within and outside the council. The service works within a child centred, multi-disciplinary and anti-discriminatory framework. There are four fostering teams, one fostering reviewing officer and the service also use a pool of independent reviewing officers to ensure foster carer's reviews are conducted in a timely manner. The Commissioning Service provide a range of placements using Brent resources and private and voluntary providers.

Since the last inspection the foster service's office has moved to a new premises where managers have their own rooms and every one else shares the large open plan office. The fostering service's office is based in Wembley High Road and is accessible by public transport.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

At this full announced inspection all key national minimum standards were inspected.

This is a good service. Children and young people's welfare is enhanced by good relationships that exist between staff, foster carers, children and young people. Children and young people receive individualised care. Their health care needs are met. The service promotes the educational attainments of children and young people. The fostering service works closely with a wide range of agencies in order to meet the assessed needs of children and young people. The fostering service promotes equality and diversity in its service deliveries. Staff are well supported by the managers who have focus on improvement of the fostering service.

However, a few shortfalls are identified in this inspection. These are as follows: some of the complaints and allegations against foster carers were not resolved within timescale. Some of the foster carers' reviews were not conducted within acceptable timeframe. Foster carers' agreements do not clearly specify their conditions of approvals and there are temporary arrangements in place for the management of the short term fostering team.

Improvements since the last inspection

Previously the fostering service was required to ensure that foster carer households have safe caring policies in place, they receive at least one unannounced visit

annually, Ofsted are notified of all safeguarding enquiries and panel members' files include all information required by regulations. The service also needed to ensure that foster carers reviews take place annually, they monitor the allegations against foster carers effectively. The fostering service was asked to ensure that their IT system is further developed to maintain children's records effectively and sufficient number of supervisory social workers are recruited to support foster carers.

Most of the above issues have been resolved. Although marked improvements are in place to review foster carers not all reviews are conducted within acceptable timeframe. The managers have good overview of the numbers and nature of the allegations against foster carers, however, some of the allegations were not resolved within timescale.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people's files provide good information about their health care needs. The fostering service has comprehensive policies and procedures in place to promote the health of children and young people in foster care. The service works to obtain the resources required to promote and secure best outcomes for children and young people. Looked after children's (LAC) nurse provides advice and support to ensure that children and young people's annual health assessments are completed. The LAC nurse also provides training to foster carers to enable them to meet children and young people's assessed health care needs. Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team meets the needs of children and young people placed in the new specialist, and also in general foster care placements. There is a specialist team working with foster carers who accommodate disabled children and young people. The Family Link recruits and supports short breaks carers for children and young people with disabilities and their families.

Foster carers provide healthy and nutritious meals to children and young people. They accompany children and young people to various medical appointments and maintain records of all appointments they have attended. Foster carers purchase first aid equipment and attend first aid training.

The inclusion of health professionals, such as a psychologist into the fostering panel offers advice on health issues to the panel.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Managers of the fostering service are very experienced and well qualified to manage the service. All social workers are qualified and have experiences in fostering tasks and in other child care works. The head of the service and the principal manager were appointed in permanent positions since the last inspection. The fostering service consists of four teams, each led by a team manager. The short term fostering

team manager's position is currently vacant.

The London Borough of Brent has a robust recruitment policy and procedure in place. Fostering staff are recruited in accordance with the policy of the Borough. The human resources department carries out all relevant checks on staff including Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks prior to the appointments. The fostering service also ensures that panel members are vetted according to the policy and procedure in place.

Foster carers provide comfortable and safe environments for children and young people. The homes visited by inspectors were warm, furnished and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. Foster carers are provided with first aid, safeguarding and safer caring training. They have purchased first aid boxes. Health and safety and condition of the foster home are explored during the assessment, at supervisory visits and during annual review. Where necessary changes to the accommodation arrangements have been made to ensure that placements continue.

An appropriate policy and procedure is in place for matching children and young people with foster carers. The duty officer based in the commissioning team has knowledge about foster carers and expertise to match children with foster carers. Where trans-racial placements are made foster carers are supported in meeting the cultural, dietary, language and other needs of children and young people placed with them. The matching process is keenly matched by the managers and children are consulted about matches and their views are taken into account. Where placements were planned good introductions were given to foster carers.

A comprehensive safeguarding policy and procedure is in place which protect children and young people. There is a policy in place on sharing bedrooms between looked after and non related children. The foster carers' handbook contains up to date information on legal requirements relating to the use of child safety restraints. Foster carers are provided with safeguarding and safer caring training. The foster carers' homes visited have safer caring policies. This was not the case during the last inspection.

The fostering service maintains a central list of all allegations made against foster carers. Managers have good overview of the numbers and nature of the allegations. However, in some cases allegations were not resolved within timescale. This was highlighted during the inspection.

There is an appropriate anti-bullying and policy in place. Foster carers are provided with guidance to deal with young people who are missing from placement.

The fostering panel is a real strength of the service. Membership of the panel is in accordance with regulations and training is made available to the panel members. The panel performs its quality assurance role well and effectively monitors the standards of work presented to panel. There is a clear policy and procedure in place that covers decision making and where there are differences of opinions these are clearly explored and documented. Panel meeting's minutes are comprehensive and

are true reflection of the discussions. There is good documentation in place with regard to foster carers' annual reviews.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Brent fostering service pays good attention to issues relating to equality and diversity. This focus is a clear strength of the service. There are sound policies in place that address issues of equality and diversity such as its Equal Opportunities Policy and the newly developed Transracial Placements Policy. These are well known to staff and foster carers and are very evident in practice. Foster carers have access to relevant information in the foster carers' handbook and training opportunities are available that address issues of equality and diversity.

The fostering service ensures that staff and foster carers work within an anti-discriminatory framework and this is regularly monitored throughout the career of foster carers. So, for example, the assessment process, approval and reviewing process all explore foster carers' ability to address issues of equality and diversity. Supervising social workers continually explore these issues with foster carers during placement visits. Similarly, the service's fostering panel ensures that foster carers and placements are well equipped to address and manage the holistic needs of children and young people in placement. The service's matching process expertly addresses the diverse and holistic needs of children and young people and endeavours to provide placements that address identified needs. Where there are noted gaps, the fostering service offers appropriate placement support.

Looked after children (LAC) reviews have a clear focus on addressing the identity needs of children and young people in foster care. The composition of the fostering team is diverse and reflects the community it seeks to serve.

The needs of children and young people who are disabled are well addressed within the fostering service. The Family Links Service is a discreet team within the fostering service that recruits and supports carers to care for young people with significant disabilities. External to this team, foster carers from Brent's general pool of foster carers also provide care to children with disabilities. The fostering service has a good track record of providing advice and practical support to placements where children living with disabilities are placed. The service has made efforts to identify and recruit potential foster carers who are gay or lesbian.

Since the last inspection the fostering service has focussed its attention on recruiting foster carers from communities that are relatively new to the Brent area. As a consequence the services' marketing strategies have focussed on communities such as the Afghanistan and Somalian communities in order to meet the needs of children in care who originate from these countries. Effective networking with community leaders has led to increased interest in fostering.

With regard to education, the fostering service promotes well the educational

achievement of looked after children. Staff considers this a priority area of their work and the service supports young people achieve academically, especially at GCSE level.

Foster carers and staff have access to written policies with regard to their role and responsibility in promoting young people's educational success. Both foster carers and staff also have access to relevant training opportunities focussed on education. Foster carers and young people confirm that foster carers are very much involved with school personnel and actively participate in school based meetings. The working relationship between staff of the fostering service and educational professionals is good.

Young people's files contain comprehensive information about their educational needs and supervisory visits consistently explore these. The fostering service keenly monitors young people's educational progress and provides placements with additional support if necessary. So, for example some young people benefit from 1:1 tuition to enhance their examination performance. Where young people are subject to statement of needs or have learning difficulties, support and encouragement from the service is good. Foster carers are keen advocates for the young people they look after and facilitate access to libraries, homework opportunities and other community based learning resources.

Foster carers and staff of the service encourage and facilitate young people's involvement in hobbies and leisure activities. The fostering service keeps foster carers informed of local events and activities, and supports the individual recreational interests of children and young people in placement.

The fostering service's family link project offers a short break service to families caring for child and young people living with disabilities. This is a discreet service within the wider fostering team and there is a dedicated staff team. Placement arrangements recognise that parents remain the main carers for children and young people accessing a short break service. Family Link foster carers have access to both general training and specific training focussed on disability. Foster carers and staff work effectively with professionals from other disciplines such as consultant paediatricians, special schools and support nurses to ensure the needs of the targeted young people are well met.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Brent Fostering Service promotes contact arrangements for children and young people in foster care placements. Foster carers and staff are committed to ensuring that young people have access to their birth families and friends safely as arranged by the local authority or ordered by the courts. The fostering service and foster carers co-ordinate complex and intricate contact arrangements for young people. Where contact is supervised, the fostering service has access to a dedicated in-house service and staff produce relevant reports. Training is available to foster carers and

staff to support practice. Staff of the service ensure that contact arrangements are consistently explored during supervisory visits and this is well documented. Children and young people are routinely spoken with by staff to solicit their views on the impact on existing contact arrangements.

The fostering service promotes effective consultation with children and young people in placement. Supervising staff routinely meet with children and young people privately to gauge placement progress and issues. Staff and foster carers encourage young people to actively participate in statutory LAC reviews and foster carers' annual review meetings to share their views. Foster carers have access to relevant training focussed on working and communicating effectively with children and young people in their care. The fostering service has good working links with local child advocacy groups and children and young people have good access to these independent services.

The fostering service has a robust complaints procedure in place and this is well known to staff, foster carers and young people in placement. The fostering service maintains centralised records of all complaints and allegations made and managers of the service monitor information and trends. The fostering service's management of complaints and allegations are thorough and in accordance with child protection and safe guarding policies. However, inspectors raised concerns with the management regarding the length of time the fostering service takes to resolve some of the complaints.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood and leaving local authority care. The department's revised 'My Place' scheme allows, where necessary, young people over the age of 18 years to remain in their foster care placement for continuity of care. Young people aged 14 years benefit from planning via the Formal Permanency Planning Meeting process to prepare them for independence. Foster carers and staff of the fostering service work well with other departmental children's teams to prepare and plan young people's transition to independent living.

Foster carers benefit from specific training geared towards supporting them work effectively with young people in preparation for leaving care. Foster carers are keenly involved in devising and following through on young people's pathway plans. Foster carers support young people with practical tasks to assist their developing independence. These include budgeting, shopping and cooking skills.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The fostering service has an updated statement of purpose which reflects the current aims and objectives of the fostering service. The service also developed two separate

children's guides. One is for the young children and other is for the older young people. These are geared to children and young people and appropriate to their age and understanding.

The fostering service is staffed by people with professional knowledge, skills and expertise necessary to help achieve quality and best outcomes for children, young people, foster carers and staff within the service.

There are clear procedures for monitoring and managing the activities of the service. The service has a good financial procedure in place.

There is a clear management structure, system of accountability, prioritising and monitoring workloads and level of delegation in place. In terms of the management of short term fostering team, there is a system in place; however, staff are not confident about effectiveness of the system. The management assured the inspectors that they are exploring more a permanent arrangement of the short term fostering team management.

Strategies are in place to ensure that assessment and approvals of foster carers are managed and implemented effectively. With regard to foster carers review, there have been marked improvement in the frequency of these since the last inspection. However, some foster carer annual reviews remain outstanding.

There is an adequate number of staff of sufficiently experienced and qualified. Staff are well supported by their line managers. They receive regular supervision and annual appraisals. Staff have access to training in order to develop their professional knowledge and skills. Team meetings are taking place on a regular basis which enable staff to establish effective communications between them.

The London Borough of Brent has a clear strategy in terms of recruiting and retaining foster carers. They have targeted specific groups in the community like Somalian and Afghan communities. The marketing department places advertisements in various newspapers, Brent website and arranges various events. The forthcoming foster carer conference is a creative consultation and training initiative, which demonstrates commitment to working effectively with foster carers. Assessments for foster carers are robust and thorough. The quality of the assessments is monitored well by managers and the fostering panel.

The fostering team has worked hard to effectively manage and support foster carers. The service provides out of hours support which is a useful provision. The fostering service provides respite care for foster carers. Good system of communication exists between fostering supervisory social workers and children's social workers.

There is a marked improvement in the training of foster carers. Comprehensive training programmes in place for foster carers. There are opportunities for them to attend National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) training. New focus is given on Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training and 65 foster carers have registered for this. There is a newly developed post that specially gears towards

meeting CWDC and other training objectives. This has been successful.

Foster carers informed the inspectors that the service provides good induction training to them. Their training needs are reviewed and training profile is in place. Foster carers annual reviews focus on training needs for them.

Children and young people's records are comprehensive and include all information required by regulations. The fostering service has sufficient number of administrative staff. Administrative records are well maintained and there is a marked improvement to record keeping since last inspection. The IT system supports the fostering service. However, some staff feels that there is still room for improvement.

All foster carers have signed carers' agreement on file. However, not all specify the conditions of approvals, for example, number of children, ages and genders.

There is a dedicated kinship fostering team in the London Borough of Brent. The Kinship fostering team is a very successful team in terms of identifying and approving a number of kinship foster carers. The team has obtained a significant number of Special Guardianship and Residence Order assessments. The team work in partnership with seven local authorities as part of the North-West London fostering consortium. The London Borough of Brent takes a lead on Kinship training. Some kinship carers are living abroad and they are well supported by the supervising social workers.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that allegations against foster carers are resolved within the timescale of the organisation (NMS 22)
- make permanent management arrangements for short term fostering team (NMS 16)
- ensure that foster carers' reviews are conducted within twelve months (NMS 16)
- ensure that foster carers' agreements clearly specify the conditions of approvals (NMS 25).