

# London Borough of Newham Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC040305
<b>Inspection date</b>	18/11/2011
<b>Inspector</b>	Tola Akinde-Hummel / Karen Malcolm
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Social Care Inspection

---

<b>Setting address</b>	London Borough of Newham, Newham Dockside, 1000 Dockside Road, LONDON, E16 2QU
<b>Telephone number</b>	0203 373 3844
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	London Borough of Newham
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Nick Dinnage
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	14/03/2008

---

© Crown copyright 2011

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**

Newham Fostering Service is situated in recently commissioned accommodation in Dockside. This is a large office block which is home to other children's services within the borough.

The fostering service includes the placement and monitoring service, fostering team, recruitment and the private fostering team. The assessment of potential foster carers is outsourced.

The fostering service offers respite care and kinship care as well as short-term and long-term placements.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The overall quality rating of this full, announced inspection is good and there are five recommendations. The Senior management structure within children's services has undergone a number of changes since the last inspection and continues to change. Direct management of the fostering team changed 18 months ago and has resulted in clear and effective leadership and a service with a sense of direction and focus. The fostering service provides a good level of service to children and young people in its care. Staff and carers are motivated and take advantage of training to enhance their practice and improve outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people are treated as individuals and efforts are made to provide stability and consistency of care within their placements. Partnership working has contributed to better planning and a greater focus on the presenting needs of children and young people.

Recommendations focus on transition planning, clarity around additional support to carers to enable them to carry out their role effectively, ensuring the children's guide is accessible to children and young people who have alternative means of communication, meeting the training, support and development standards and making clear the focus of unannounced supervising social workers' visits.

The service recognises that it still has areas to improve and is keen to take up the challenge. Further redesign of the children's service is underway.

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

The previous inspection made five recommendations all of which have been met. The service has addressed: the content and availability of placement plans; Criminal Records Bureau checks for panel members; recorded information on the frequency of

visits from children's social workers; the review and appraisal of staff and the children's guide for older and younger children. All recommendations have resulted in clearer information, readily available about children and young people enabling appropriate health care to be provided, improved practice in the selection of panel members, good audit trails to ensure children and young people are visited as prescribed and the accessibility of information in the form of children's guides suitable for all ages.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Children and young people receive a good level of attention to their individual health needs. All children and young people are registered with primary care services. The looked after children's nurses ensure that health assessments are completed in a timely manner and immunisation records are maintained. They identify and try to engage hard to reach young people to promote good health. Good links with the children and family consultation service means that tailored psychological support is made available to children and young people.

Children and young people with disabilities and complex health needs are ably supported by foster carers. They receive training and advice from within children's services and medical professionals to ensure children's specific requirements are fully understood. Specialist equipment is provided to promote high quality care and in some cases, independence. Children and young people's health plans are always considered through a number of channels including placement planning meetings and, looked after children's reviews. This means that any additional health needs that arise can be addressed without delay.

Foster carers understand and meet the expectations the service has of them in supporting children and young people to maintain optimum health. Training and advice assist foster carers to manage all health needs and appointments effectively. Foster carers help children and young people understand the importance of eating, living healthy lifestyles and taking sufficient rest and exercise.

Children and young people live in fostering households that are comfortable and welcoming to them. Necessary aids and adaptations are provided to foster carers to support the care of children and young people. Health and safety matters are addressed and foster carers understand their responsibility to ensure their homes and vehicles remain safe for children and young people.

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

The provision is good.

Foster carers show a good level of understanding about children and young people's safety. Specialised and multi-disciplinary training in safeguarding and e-safety is provided to foster carers. This enables the fostering services partners such as

education, youth offending and health to strengthen working relationships and improve communication around safeguarding concerns. Risk assessments completed by the service enable foster carers to understand the challenges they may face looking after children and young people. To further support fostering households there are safe caring policies, training and advice on bullying and guidance in relation to privacy to safeguard the whole household.

Foster carers are aware of their responsibility to report concerns about any adults in relation to the safeguarding of children and young people in their care. The whistleblowing policy is clear and accessible to foster carers. One Foster carer said, 'The police, emergency duty team and the other foster carer were excellent.' This demonstrates there is a holistic approach to safeguarding and that foster carers have a good understanding about the processes they are expected to follow.

Children and young people report that they feel safe and secure within foster homes. Foster carers are supported to maintain an atmosphere of openness and warmth for children and young people. This gives a sense of belonging thereby reducing the need for them to leave without explanation. Foster carers know that there are a variety of reasons why children and young people may try and leave their homes. They discuss the potential risks and personal safety strategies with children and young people as part of their responsibility to keep them safe. One young person said, 'My foster carer knows me very well she gives me lots of advice including health and safety; she is the best.' The numbers of children and young people who go missing are low. Foster carers have clear guidelines that explain what action they need to do should a child or young person go missing. These are in line with the local protocols and procedures.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people live with foster carers who are genuinely interested in their progress and development into young adults. Foster carers receive training from professionals providing therapeutic support. This means that foster carers gain a greater insight into children and young people's behaviour while being provided with practical ways to manage this. The introduction of a fostering changes programme completed by some foster carers has positively changed the way in which foster carers manage behaviour, offer praise and support the learning of children and young people. The fostering service does not have any incidences of physical intervention by foster carers. Training and written guidance on de escalation techniques is provided. This is accompanied by additional therapeutic support to children and young people and foster carers to manage their feelings and reduce the risk of placement breakdown. As well as the heightened sensitivity foster carers have to the needs of children and young people, they also encourage children and young people to take responsibility for their own behaviour, according to their age and ability.

Children and young people pursue hobbies and leisure interests during their

placement with foster families. One young person stated, 'I am taking violin lessons at the moment.' The borough has leisure cards available for children and young people to access sports facilities. Children and young people say that they are informed of any activities taking place in the borough that may be of interest to them. Foster carers living outside the borough are encouraged to access local community resources. The activities that children participate in are monitored by independent reviewing officers, the child's social workers and supervising social workers to ensure that a holistic approach is taken to their social, emotional and physical health and well-being. Foster carers take children and young people on day trips and where appropriate take them on longer holidays. One young person stated 'I love going to the caravan.' Children and young people are able to invite friends to their foster home and can visit their own friends. Annual events, such as the picnic in the park and awards ceremony, are organised by the service for children and young people and their carers.

Children and young people's education is actively promoted within the foster home. They have personal education plans which highlight their learning needs and identify additional support required. The recently reviewed children looked after support project (CLASP) has an overview of these plans and provides extra tuition for children and young people identified as needing this. Relationships between children's schools within the borough and CLASP are improving to ensure schools understand some of the additional barriers to learning that looked after children have. The virtual head teacher and the team work closely with children and young people and foster carers including: those children and young people who are gifted and talented; children who have additional needs due to disability and children accessing under 5's provisions. Participation of the service in the foster carers' training has raised the awareness of the role they and foster carers play in achieving better outcomes in education for children and young people.

Foster carers meet the expectation placed on them to advocate on behalf of children and young people in relation to their education. Foster carers also play a vital role in helping children and young people identify and pursue their aspirations. Foster carers' attendance at parents' evenings and school performances is recognised as important. Any limitations foster carers may have in supporting children and young people in their education is identified by supervising social workers and work is done to address these.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people enjoy a good level of consultation about their wishes and feelings and plans for the future. Children know how to complain and are given this opportunity by a number of adults involved in their lives. Complaints made independently by children and young people are few in number. The annual foster home review ensures that the views of children are sought and any comments made by them that require further exploration are followed up by the supervising social worker. The service recognises that more needs to be done to better elicit the views

of those children and young people without verbal methods of communication. Children and young people have the opportunity to engage in more formal consultation through groups such as the children in care council and the children's rights group.

The placement and monitoring service ensures that the views and wishes of children are captured prior to looking for an appropriate placement and how they will fit into a family is assessed. Tailored support packages are put together to help the stability of placements. Children and young people's needs are recognised and addressed. Where a foster carer lacks some of the skills or knowledge to carry out part of the caring task additional support is provided. One young person commented, 'I feel like I am in a family.' This view was echoed by other young people. Children and young people receive a personal allowance and all foster carers save money for the children they look after. This excellent practice allows children and young people to have some money when they leave care and are planning for their independence.

Where appropriate, children and young people maintain contact with family members and other significant people in their life. Careful consideration is given to planning contact arrangements and social workers are routinely involved; this helps ensure that contact is in each child or young person's best interests. Foster carers recognise the importance of children and young people maintaining contact and understand that this may sometimes have an impact on children and young people's behaviour. Coping strategies, discussions with relevant professionals and detailed records are kept to assess the impact of contact on children and young people.

The majority of children and young people are placed with foster carers in an emergency situation. Despite there being little time for introductions, the emergency duty team have profiles of all foster carers and share the relevant information with children and young people before they move in. This minimises some of the anxiety children and young people have about going to a new environment. Planned placements begin with an introduction before moving in and in some cases, children and young people will visit a number of foster carers before deciding which home they believe will best suit them.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people do not receive well coordinated services to help them manage the transition into adulthood. Foster carers, children's social workers and young people all agree that this is an area for development. There were some examples of good work, however, planning for transition often starts too late. In addition some young people are unable to accept that they will be moving on eventually and will need skills in order for this to be successful. Arrangements for disabled children also start late particularly for coordination with adult services. The service recognises the need to be proactive when they identify that young people are disengaging and take steps to move the care plan forward in a positive multi-disciplinary way. The fostering service has lost the expertise of a their sexual health worker who established good



independent links with young people to address social and sexual relationships. Universal health services are available in the community and young people are sign posted to these. Young people can also seek advice from the looked after children's nurses and foster carers but often choose not to take this up. Foster carers help young people develop practical skills such as budgeting, laundry and cooking. Young people find this valuable. The continued education of young people is considered and plans are in place to strengthen relationships with local further education colleges. The borough provides some apprenticeships for those young people interested in securing work.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The service is managed by an effective and dedicated management team who have been working together for a relatively short period of time. Partnership working with other departments is good in most areas and this has a positive impact on accessing support for children and young people. The team have identified areas for development and are taking the necessary steps to improve the service. Monitoring, audits and various surveys help to inform practice.

The service has a strategy in place to recruit carers to meet the demand and profile of children and young people coming through the care system. This is especially difficult given the diversity of the population in the borough. The number of carers in assessment has exceeded the target the service has set. The assessment of foster carers, undertaken externally, is quality assured by the provider with an additional quality assurance mechanism within the fostering team. This minimises any delay at the panel stage and upholds the high standards expected by the service for identifying carers with the right qualities to look after children and young people.

The maintenance of the central list for panel is thorough and demonstrates that proper checks are carried out prior to any invitation to observe and join the panel as a member. All panel members receive an induction and further training. The fostering panel is led by an experienced chair who is able to ensure that relevant questions are given due consideration. Outcomes of panel recommendations are dealt with in a timely manner by the agency decision maker and foster carers do not experience any delay.

Given the diversity of the borough exact matches in terms of race and culture are not always possible. However, foster carers have a range of skills and these are considered when looking at the needs of individual children. Foster carers demonstrate a willingness to learn about other cultures and practices and make use of their colleagues and supervising social workers within the service to meet specific needs. Placement information records make clear where a foster carer requires some assistance to meet the needs of children and young people but is not routinely explicit about what these needs are and how they will be met.

The appropriate matching of friends and family is always considered. Following

assessment friends and family carers are provided with the same access to training and support as foster carers. One family and friends carer said, 'I am really happy with the way the assessment was done and the help and advice we get from the supervising social worker.'

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service provides care to children and young people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Difference is welcomed and celebrated, enabling the service to develop expertise in many areas. The service welcomes same sex couples, single carers and has a good track record of supporting disabled children.

The Statement of Purpose makes clear the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The children's guide is detailed and informative. However, it is not available in a format accessible to children and young people who use alternative methods of communication. This means specific groups of young people rely on other people to provide the information relevant to them or not have the information at all.

The recruitment, training and supervision of staff and foster carers within the fostering team is robust. The training programme is designed to develop and refresh staff, promote good practice and maintain the underpinning values of good quality support to children and young people. Supervising social workers appreciate the ongoing guidance provided by managers. Relevant training and positive working relationships throughout the service enable thoughtful and individual care to be provided consistently to children and young people. Foster carers receive a well written and useful handbook and can attend support groups with guest speakers of their choice. The overwhelming opinion of foster carers is that they are provided with very good support from their supervising social workers. Supervising social workers often act over and above their roles to ensure that placements are very well supported

Foster carers have at least one annual unannounced visit by their supervising social worker. Records show that these visits are not focused and do not always act as a measure for assessing the quality of care provided to children and young people.

Annual foster home reviews and supervising social work visits show that there is a low completion rate by foster carers of the training, support and development standards for foster care. The fostering service has offered workshops and mentoring to foster carers but this has had little impact. Deadlines are set by the fostering service to complete the portfolios but these lapse.

Allegations and suspicions of harm are managed well. The Local Authority Designated Officer ensures that investigations are undertaken with minimal delay and conclusions are reached promptly. The referral procedure clarifies issues relating to standards of care and child protection. Foster carers understand the process if an allegation is made against them.

Information about children and young people and foster carers is securely stored electronically.

## 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 there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence (NMS 12.3)
- ensure that prior to the placement of each child, information about the child is provided in a clear comprehensive written form and includes the support available to the foster carer (NMS 15.2) ( Regulation 17.3)
- make the children's guide available in suitable alternative methods of communication where a child requires it(NMS 16.6)
- evidence that the training, support and development standards have been attained (NMS 20.2)
- provide a clear purpose of unannounced visits to ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs. ( NMS 21.8)