

# London Borough of Barnet Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

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<b>Responsible individual</b>	Marion Patricia Ingram
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	19/09/2008

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

The London Borough of Barnet fostering service is managed by the local authority. It provides a range of fostering placements and consists of three teams: the recruitment and training team; support and development team and kinship and permanence team. The London Borough of Barnet has 111 fostering households and 128 children and young people are placed within these households.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The London Borough of Barnet fostering service is a good service. The fostering service provides good quality of care to children and young people in foster placements. The service sustains fostering placements very well through high quality of support and supervision. Children and young people come from diverse backgrounds and they are well matched with the caring and competent foster carers. The service promotes equality and diversity in its practice and this well reflects in its recruitment of foster carers and staff.

Managers and staff are qualified and have extensive experience of working in the field of fostering and child protection. Staff and foster carers demonstrate a real commitment to providing quality care to children and young people. There are clear recruitment strategies in place to ensure the service has sufficient numbers of foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people requiring foster care placements. There are effective procedures and practices in place to ensure the assessment process of foster carers is robust and the service is successful in its efforts to retain approved foster carers.

Leadership and management of the fostering service are strong. The service ensures that all key policies are in place; safeguarding policies and procedures are comprehensive. Staff and foster carers' training opportunities are excellent and both have access to specialist training and support. The service's fostering panel functions effectively. The good links with the health and educational professionals bring

together a range of skilled professionals who work collectively to support children and young people in order to achieve the best possible outcomes in care.

To further improve, the fostering service must ensure that all foster carers complete their children's workforce development council training and ensure that foster carers and children's records are clear, up to date and stored securely.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that all foster carers complete their Children's Workforce Development Council's training (NMS 20.2)
- ensure that fostering service's records are clear, up to date, stored securely and contribute to an understanding of the child's life. (NMS 26)

### Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Children and young people say that they are very happy living in their fostering placements. They are cared for, loved and treated as part of their fostering family. Children and young people say that their foster carers are very nice. In order to ensure that they are more stable in their placements, foster carers show a great deal of consideration and awareness of the religious and cultural beliefs and needs of the children and young people. Foster carers listen to children and young people's wishes and feelings and act upon these. One foster child said that, 'they (foster carers) love us so much that they do not need to do anymore. It's amazing'.

Children and young people aware of their backgrounds, family history and develop a sense of identity through their care history. Social workers and foster carers have training in undertaking life story work, which helps children and young people to have an understanding of their backgrounds. Children and young people are able to actively participate in the running of the fostering service and decision-making process. For example, they take part in the fostering staff and carers' recruitment process to ensure that they understand the needs of children in foster care. Children and young people can raise their voice through their various representations. They also contribute to the development of foster carer and staff training programmes. Children and young people live in more stable placements. Unplanned placement ending within the local authority are below national average. The placement stability brings benefits in the continuity of education, maintaining their social networks and keeping constructive contacts with their family and friends.

Children and young people enjoy good general health. Younger children are

effectively supported to attend all of their routine health care appointments; older teenagers leave care with an up-to-date health history which enables them to transfer to adult services where necessary. Effective communication and liaison between health agencies provides young people with the help and advice they need to maintain good health. Recent campaigns within the authority are targeting subjects including substance misuse and teenage pregnancies. Young people are making safer choices as a result.

Children and young people are improving year upon year in terms of their education attendance and achievement. Foster carers take good advantage of play group and nursery provision within the borough; younger children achieve their developmental milestones because they are stimulated and engaged. Older children receive the targeted help and support they need. Attendance figures are rising, as are final exam results; young people are beginning to value education and the opportunities available to them. One foster carer said that two asylum seeking children who came to England without having much knowledge in English have been very successful in their lives and they are now studying medicine at university.

Children and young people develop various life skills which are essential for future adulthood. They say that they do budgeting and get involved in household shopping with their foster carers. Older children are able to travel to and from school and are familiar with local community. Children and young people say that they experience a wide range of activities and holidays abroad in their fostering placements. Several young people were members of social or sporting clubs and this helps them to integrate into their local community and improve their self-confidence.

### **Quality of service**

The quality of the service is **good**.

The fostering service recruits a wide range of foster carers through various methods according to the researched needs of children and young people with diverse backgrounds. The fostering service carries out comprehensive assessments of prospective foster carers. Prospective foster carers take part in pre-approval training; this informs them about what fostering entails and help them explore their views and attitudes. Written assessments reports are relevant, evidenced based, analytical and fully explore applicants' ability to offer safe care. This ensures that assessment reports proactively assist the panel's decision-making.

The local authority's fostering panel is well managed and its members have a wide range of expertise. The panel members understand the needs of children and young people and attend regular training to ensure that they fulfil their roles effectively. The panel's quality assurance functions ensure that high standards of assessments are conducted to recruit good quality foster carers.

An on-going training programme is in place for foster carers which helps ensure that they are well equipped to meet the needs of children and young people in their care. Training needs are identified during monthly visits to foster carers and annual

reviews and take in consideration of any gaps in their skills, knowledge and understanding the needs of individual child. Foster carers receive training and guidance in order to protect and promote healthy lifestyles. The majority of foster carers are up to date with training, such as first aid and medication management. Positive links are established with the looked after children's (LAC) nurse and a dedicated GP for looked after children has very recently been appointed. Robust monitoring systems ensure that the vast majority of health assessments, immunisations and dental checks remain up to date. Wherever requested, the LAC nurse conducts home visits; many children prefer this and it encourages their participation.

Robust monitoring systems reliably inform the corporate parenting team of the educational challenges of its looked after children. A coordinated approach has specifically targeted the quality of personal education plans; these are rigorously quality assured and those children experiencing learning issues and difficulties are keenly targeted for additional resources. Designated headteachers are fully on board. A creative project within a local primary school is working hard to encourage older children to act as mentors and gain valuable work experience at the same time. Although historic figures relating to educational attendance and achievement have been lower than the national average, the authority is able to clearly demonstrate improvements year upon year. Fixed term exclusions are occurring, but more positively, there have been no permanent exclusions during the last year.

Children's social workers have a very good knowledge about foster carers skills and this help matching foster children to foster families. Foster carers have good and positive relationships with their supervising social workers who visit them regularly and monitor the progress of children at the placements. A foster carer said that: 'the training opportunities for Barnet foster carers are wonderful and the fostering service invests in their foster carers in order to achieve best possible outcomes for foster children'.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Children and young people live in a family environment where competent foster carers provide a nurturing, stable and safe environment. Children and young people say that they feel safe in their fostering placements and never experienced bullying. Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place to protect children and young people from harm and ensure they are safe and secure. Promotion of safe care is a focus for fostering team throughout carers' recruitment, assessment and post approval. Good implementation of safe care ensures that upheld allegations are minimal, placement stability has improved, and numbers of children who are putting themselves at risk by going missing are very low.

All foster carers and fostering staff have received child protection training. The fostering service closely works with the local authority designated officer for safeguarding matters and seeks her advice on safeguarding concerns. She also offers

training in managing allegations against foster carers to foster carers and fostering staff. The allegation of abuse and neglect by children and young people against foster carers is low. These are dealt with effectively and when they do occur, both children and carers are appropriately supported.

Children's social workers undertake very effective statutory visits for monitoring children's placements and ensuring that these meeting their needs. The fostering service conducts effective unannounced visits to foster carers' homes to ensure that children and young people live in a safe environment. The service carries out all statutory checks on fostering household members and visitors to safeguard children and young people in foster care.

Children and young people said that they know how to complain and how to talk to people to express any concerns regarding their care. They have access to independent advocacy services. Complaints received by the service are investigated thoroughly within timescale and outcomes are recorded.

### **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the local authority fostering agency are **good**.

The leadership and management of this fostering service are strong. The fostering service managers provide good leadership and direction to foster carers and they are accessible to staff, foster carers and children for advice and guidance. The managers monitor the performance and delivery of the fostering service. They demonstrate a keen commitment to providing quality foster care placements that improve outcomes for children and young people. All recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed.

The fostering service has a Statement of Purpose which states the aims and objectives of the service and all interested parties have access to this. The children's guide is written in a child friendly format and this provides information about the facilities which are available to them. There is clear management structure that ensures there are clear lines of accountability throughout the service. Managers of the service have developed a good working relationship with other agencies including police, education and health to ensure a joint approach when assessing and meeting looked after children's needs. There is an excellent learning and development programme for staff that addresses their individual development needs. Supervision and support are readily available and highly valued. Staff appraisals are conducted on an annual basis.

The fostering service regularly consults with children and young people, their parents and foster carers. This includes: consultation with children; recently seeking their views about the development of a Foster Care Charter; regular consultation with foster carers towards the service developments and improvements to promote outcomes for children in foster care.

The fostering service's premises and administrative systems are suitable and meet

the aims of the service. Children and young people's case records and foster carers' files are generally well maintained electronically. However, there are some inconsistencies in quality of information available in some of the files. For example, there was a variable quality of records of training attendance of foster carers, unannounced and supervising social worker's visits and records of safe care policies. The fostering service has developed a clear financial policy and foster carers have access to this that relate to payments and allowances.

The service's placement planning processes are effective. Staff's decision making is informed by a good understanding of the assessed needs of children and young people and of foster carers' skills and individual situations. Staff and foster carers contribute well to placement planning reviews and statutory reviews. This enhances understanding of children and young people's placement progress and issues, which in turn supports the sustainability of foster care placements.

Family and friends foster carers receive the support they require to provide safe, quality care to children and young people. The support and supervision of family and friends carers is good and they have access to relevant training opportunities and support. The fostering service is successful in promoting this and the use of other routes to secure permanence for children and young people.



## 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for local authority fostering agencies.