



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Lewisham LA Fostering

**Laurence House
1 Catford Road
Catford
London
SE6 4SW**

Lead Inspector
Rossella Volpi

Announced Inspection
September / October 2006

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained 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

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Lewisham LA Fostering
Address	Laurence House 1 Catford Road Catford London SE6 4SW
Telephone number	020 8314 7113
Fax number	020 8314 3024
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Lewisham Children's Social Care
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Authority Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

This is a local authority fostering service located in an inner city area. The primary aim is that of providing safe and professional foster care within the borough for every Lewisham child who needs this service.

To this end Lewisham endeavours to recruit and retain foster carers who match the racial, cultural, linguistic and religious needs of the borough's looked after children. The support and training offered to carers seek to enable them to meet the diverse needs of the children placed, in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, differing abilities and supporting positive identity formation for each child.

The fostering team works with other services towards ensuring that looked after children have the same opportunities as all children in the borough.

The service was part of two major restructurings in the children's directorate, in 2004 and 2005, which involved some radical changes at management level. The current structure (from April 2005) placed both fostering and adoption services, including its business support, under the lead of one service manager, directly accountable to the children's social care director. The director is the designated decision maker for fostering and adoption.

Fostering mainly consists of one recruitment and assessment team and two support and development teams, each team led by a team manager. They provide: short term and long term foster carers, remand carers (who offer placements to young people remanded to the care of the authority by the courts), carers who offer short breaks for children with disabilities, carers approved to look after named children who are family members or friends of the family.

There are nineteen full time equivalent social work posts, three assistant social work post and four business support posts. At 1 August 2006, there were 114 approved fostering households and 135 children placed.

The premises are offices, located in the civic centre of Lewisham.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was part of the adoption and fostering joint inspection. This report only relates to fostering, but the inspections included some joint tasks and planning. The aim for such joint working was to obtain a more holistic view of the service and of the outcomes for looked after children in the directorate.

The inspection of the fostering service, which was conducted by Bernard Burrell and Rossella Volpi over a number of days in late September/early October 2006, included:

- Individual discussion with some children, carers and one children's social worker.
- A meeting with representatives of the local foster carers' association.
- Discussion with each member of the fostering management team, including the director of children's social care.
- Discussion with a number of other senior managers in the directorate or external professionals.
- Discussion with the elected member of the council with portfolio responsibility for looked after children.
- Group and individual discussions with supervising social workers and members of the business support team.
- Observation of one panel's session.
- Inspection of files and other records.

Questionnaires were sent to children in placement, carers and children's social workers and the response has informed this inspection. (17 questionnaires were received back from children, 25 from carers and 5 from social workers). Four parents also gave their views. Their experiences, both positive and negative, were significantly different from each other.

The inspection has been informed by a range of written documents, which the authority made available, on request from CSCI, including the service manager's own annual assessment of the service.

What the service does well:

Lewisham fostering made a good contribution to safeguarding and promoting children's welfare and offered a service valued by its users.

Children said this directly in comments such as:

"I feel cared for where I am now because they talk to me and kind of treat me like family".

"I feel safe here".

"They take care of me and always tell me a nice thing, teach me how to behave in school".

"They look after me and I have lots of friends"

Discussion with children and observations during the visits showed that they were at ease with the carers, while the carers conveyed genuine interest in the children and a sense of well-considered responsibility to promote their development and opportunities.

The comments from children's own social workers indicated that they thought that children were well cared for, that the fostering service was good or excellent at maintaining stability of placement, promoting health, education and addressing issues of equality.

The majority of carers were proud to be part of Lewisham fostering service and some representative comments were:

"I enjoy fostering for Lewisham".

"They are very focused on the child".

"They support me to make sure I meet the child's cultural needs".

"I have an excellent supporting supervising social worker"

"The fostering service respects differences and expects you to do the same".

The comments above from children, their social workers and their carers, together with other evidence gathered during the inspection, led to the conclusion that the service was conducted in the best interest of children.

There was an experienced and skilful panel, effectively chaired, thorough and child focused in the process of assessing and reviewing carers' suitability.

There was inspired and enthusiastic robust management, with a clear strategy for continuing improvement.

There was a committed business support (including secretariat) and social work team, all working together towards progressing the agenda for improvement of the council.

Elected members were aware of their responsibility as corporate parents.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Lewisham children's social care, of which fostering and adoption were part, underwent a considerable transformation in the last 18 months. From a position of high staff vacancies and extensive use of agency personnel, the service has recently been fully staffed with predominately permanent employees.

The proportion of looked after children in foster placements rose from 65.8% in 2004-05 to 74.3% in 2005-06. There had been successful recruitment of new carers. A number of support groups for specific groups of foster carers had started. Closer working practices with other teams supporting looked after children had been established.

Although there were some challenges that the authority was still to resolve, carers and staff generally recognised the great efforts made by the authority during the past two years and the improvements in the service: *"There have been a difficult few years for the fostering department with lots of changes...However, there are a number of excellent supervising social workers who are loyal to Lewisham and their carers and they are further reason for me to stay with Lewisham"*. (Carer)

What they could do better:

The main consistent message, from children and young people, was that although most would raise concerns with their own family, friends or carers, they did not feel able to make a complain to the authority.

Some carers said that the authority gave them inconsistent advice and suggested, for example: *"Better induction for staff so that everybody is singing from the same hymn sheet. Staff are coming in with different experiences and procedures, this needs to be coordinated better"*. (Carer)

A few carers expressed dissatisfaction about how their concerns had been dealt with and said that, at times, there had been inability to address contentious issues. This indicated that the authority might still face a significant challenge in trying to rebuild the necessary trust and confidence with some carers.

The effort of the service to promote equality and value for diversity would be enhanced by clearer policies and statement of intent and more effective training for carers in this area.

Staff files needed to be reorganised to make the information easier to find.

Priorities in the improvement agenda, already identified by the authority, were: Improving stability of placements; continuing to improve attendance and attainment of looked after children and young people; continuing to increase the number of Lewisham foster carers.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this area was excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service promoted the health and development of children.

EVIDENCE:

The young people considered that their health needs were well met and that carers gave them appropriate advice for a healthy life style. For example they commented: *"They want me to be healthy"*; or: *"I got leaflets on safe sex, chlamydia, healthy diets and periods and on how to look after yourself."*

Discussion with staff and carers gave evidence of how the service supported carers and monitored how they helped children and young people to receive the services, which met their needs.

Carers' attitudes and ability to promote health would be appraised during the assessment process, training, monitoring visits and at reviews. Carers were expected, for example, to ensure that all children were registered with a general practitioner, that children received routine health checks, including attending dental and optician appointments. They would help the child to access specialist help, if needed and would act as their advocates, if necessary.

Carers received training and support in making young people aware of the dangers of substance abuse or smoking, in encouraging sexual health and a healthy diet. One carer felt that placing children with people who smoke was inconsistent with the authority's message to carers about role modelling a healthy lifestyle. She said that the authority should be clearer on this point, as it had caused some confusion.

Specific training on a range of health or disabilities' topics was provided. Some carers raised that they would find helpful to have more training in medications for babies. This was related to the managers during the inspection.

The looked after children's nurse (LAC nurse) worked closely with carers to assist on specific matters relating to the child in placement, when needed. Discussion with the nurse gave additional evidence of the emphasis that Lewisham was putting on supporting health for looked after children. The LAC nurse considered that appropriate services were available in the borough for children with disabilities, including those with the most complex needs.

The main reason why this area was judged excellent, even though targets on health checks had not yet been fully achieved, was the emphasis that Lewisham had put into a holistic approach to health and into making the statutory annual medical assessment a more positive experience for the young people. Young people confirmed this directly during the inspection. The children's rights and participation officer also agreed with this. She considered that the department had taken health very seriously. The work of the LAC nurse had been a major influence in promoting health and demystifying it for children.

For example, the LAC nurse had been meeting the young people where they preferred. In the discussion during the inspection the nurse gave many examples of the kind of dialogue held with young people. She showed how the approach tried to encourage self-esteem and value in themselves, recognising that health, protection and education are entwined. The new emphasis on health assessments as a positive experience in a relaxed environment was starting to be successful in including young people who had previously refused to have a health assessment.

The nurse emphasised that such move from a medical model to a holistic model had not been at the detriment of the clinical observations and actions. The depth and thoroughness of the health assessment had been maintained.

Emotional health was well supported; the authority had identified that a high percentage of the looked after young people had suffered from some mental distress. A mental health specialist was attached to the leaving care team, which took referrals up to age 21, supporting transition to adult services. The youth service worked directly with looked after children at risk of teenage pregnancy, addressing a full range of sexual health issues. There was a system of referral to the specialist services that ensured priority of response for looked after children.

Discussion / training sessions for carers, led by health professionals, were held about emotional health. Life story work was undertaken with all pre-adoption children and children placed long term to secure their emotional development.

When interpreters were needed, the authority tried to use the same interpreter for all appointments and, if appropriate, a same sex interpreter. Contribution from parents was encouraged and particular emphasis in achieving this was given for children whose care plan was to return home.

Overall the authority had a strong history of good performance in ensuring that looked after children received the appropriate health checks. It was understood that a current priority was that of improving access to health for children placed outside Lewisham.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Quality in this area was good. This judgement was made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Child protection was at the forefront of the managers' conduct of the fostering service. The authority took robust steps to promote children's welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect. This indicated that the service was making a good contribution to safeguarding children.

EVIDENCE:

Young people interviewed said that they felt safe at the placement. The younger child seen during the inspection seemed at ease with the carer, confident in the environment and was speaking freely about the day at school, the plans for the weekend, likes and dislikes.

Assessments of carers were thorough. This was confirmed by the chair of the panel, who was satisfied with the quality of the assessments presented. Quality of the written reports had been variable, but the panel chair considered that, although an issue, this normally was not a reflection of the quality of the assessments. The director discussed his plans to improve the quality of the written reports.

There had been a couple of instances, noted from inspection of files, where there was an omission in the checks of the carer household when approved (this had then been rectified). Discussion with the managers gave assurance that this had happened during a particular difficult period, of about one year ago and of the reasons why they would not be likely to reoccur.

The carers (with whom this was discussed) experienced the assessments to be suitable to safeguard children. They appreciated that all substitute carers were interviewed to ensure that they were clear about their role and responsibilities. Carers expressed their anxiety, though, about the recent government guidance about checks only being necessary for a more restricted range of people than previously included. They felt that this affected their ability to properly protect the children in their care.

This was related to the managers, who would follow up the concerns at carers' meetings. As the guidance was new, to help clarity also amongst support staff and supervising social workers, the files should show the manager's decision about whether a check should be renewed (or indeed conducted) in individual cases affected by the guidance, with a brief reason. (See recommendation).

Management had taken appropriate action regarding concerns about carers or complaints from children. (In the previous 12 months there had been 3 allegations against 2 carers). Guidance had been issued on how child protection allegations against foster carers would be dealt with and training was to be delivered in autumn 2006. The fostering service manager had set up regular meetings with the child protection co-ordinator to monitor the progress of cases.

There had been a death of a child in care, which was investigated by the relevant agencies. The causes were found to be natural.

There continued to be evidence, from carers visited, questionnaires received and records, that the department monitored how carers provided safe, healthy and nurturing environments. Health and safety checks were completed. Each carer's household was required to develop a family policy.

Carers said that they were offered an ongoing programme of training, which included courses on child protection, safe caring and managing difficult behaviour. Cycle safety training was also offered. Training in the evening or at weekend was going to be introduced, to better meet needs of carers.

Lewisham had been working hard to improve stability of placements, with some good results. Carers acknowledged this:

"I recently was well supported regarding issues that could have destabilised a long term placement".

"My current placement is one of the most difficult I have worked with in a long time. I have had every possible support from both the child's social worker and the fostering team".

The fact that children overall were satisfied with the service indicated that Lewisham fostering recruited carers suitable for the individual needs of the children. Additionally the managers for the placement and procuring service discussed how matching was the subject of strategic planning, with much analysis of the changing trends in needs and planning of how to ensure that the service could meet these adequately.

The managers recognised that placement breakdown rates were still higher than aimed for. They had been endeavouring to ensure that appropriate information would be available before placement, to enable proper matching. Some carers still raised this as a concern though. (See recommendation).

The placement and procurement service manager considered that Lewisham had been able to offer a choice of carers for longer-term placements, but not yet for short-term placements. She said that communication between her team and supervising social workers had improved significantly and this aided more informed decisions on matching. She outlined a number of other steps taken or strategies being considered to reduce placement breakdowns.

Matching took serious account of the child's culture and race, however this would be better guided by a clear policy by the authority on transracial / transcultural placements. (See recommendation). Comments received from two (out of four) parents also pointed out to the need for this.

The director discussed, during the inspection, how Lewisham's previous risk averse culture had not, overall, well supported considered decisions about children's best interest. Lewisham was moving towards a culture of risk assessments to be robust enough to protect children and avoid unnecessary intervention. This would go hand in hand with sound quality assurance systems.

For fostering in particular, the authority recognised that it would be more difficult to perform robust quality assurance if Lewisham was to continue to use a large number of independent agencies. Therefore there was a renewed emphasis in the recruiting of its own carers. The service was rightly proud of their recent success in recruitment.

Regarding suitability of staff and managers, Lewisham had a robust recruitment and vetting policy. Procedures included interview, the making of telephone enquiries to follow up written references and criminal records bureau checks (CRBs). Random inspection of a sample of staff's files showed that files should be audited and reorganised urgently to make the information easier to

find and to review that all steps to protect children have been taken. (See recommendation).

Children's statutory reviews were conducted regularly and it was an additional safeguard that they were chaired by an independent reviewing officer (IRO). Discussion with an IRO showed the emphasis that Lewisham was putting in attempting to make the reviews more child friendly, thus to improve attendance of the child and involvement of parents.

The foster carers' association raised that, depending on whom the IRO was, carers might not receive the review notes, sometimes for long periods. This was a problem for the carers involved; it meant that they would not be sure of the revised care plan and could not discuss the findings properly with the young person. This was discussed with the managers during the inspection who would try to get more specific information from the association, so as to better address the issues.

The panel was a joint panel for Lewisham fostering and a voluntary organisation fostering agency. The chair was employed by Lewisham as a senior manager in the area of safeguarding children. The panel's membership included representatives with a range of diverse skills and experiences. There was access to medical and legal advisors. One panel session was observed and the chair of the panel separately interviewed.

The reason for the scoring of 4 in the standard relating to the panel, was because of the depth of the discussion and wide range of relevant matters considered by the panel, in their role of appraising the assessments of the carers, identifying gaps, if any and making recommendations about suitability.

The panel was child focused and all that was discussed was directly relevant to the welfare and protection of the child and of how the matters being considered would contribute to or hinder the child's opportunities. To this end the panel put equal emphasis and thought to the appropriateness of the terms of approval. The panel acted as an important quality assurance tool for the service and an additional safeguard for the protection of children. The scoring also took account that Lewisham fostering service has a history of providing an effective panel.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7, 13, 31

Quality in this area was good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Diversity was valued and efforts made to accommodate children's individual needs; this would be enhanced by clear policies and more effective training for carers.

The service placed strong emphasis on providing suitable educational opportunities for young people.

Arrangements for short breaks were sensitive to the fact that parents remained the main carers.

EVIDENCE:

The assessment of carers, including the appraisal by panel, gave due emphasis to their ability to promote equality and value diversity. The managers in the fostering and in the placements and procurement service gave evidence of the importance placed on this in ensuring the well being of the child in placement.

One young person interviewed, who was in a transracial placement, considered that her needs had been well met. The file showed that the assessment and visits by the supervising social worker had looked in depth at the ability of the carers in this area and at the support they might need.

Interpreters were available for children and parents for whom English was not their first or chosen language; attempts had been made to establish links with relevant cultural centres.

Efforts continued to be made to recruit carers from racial groups and communities that reflected those of the young people in the borough. The fostering service welcomed and supported an as yet small number of foster carers from the lesbian and gay communities.

To enhance this work a recommendation is made regarding training and policy (also referred to above in the section on safeguarding).

Children and carers considered that educational or other achievements were encouraged. For example one young person commented: *"I have realised what I want to be when I am older and everyone is helping me to achieve that"*. Young people spoke of the one to one tuition and equipment they had received.

Representative comments from carers were: *"The child's social worker has worked very hard with the child and the school to get the child where she is today"*; or: *"Financially the department put in place every tool to aid the best environment for the child, which also included high education and university"*.

A children's advocate suggested that while support for young people was very good, equal emphasis should be given to younger children also.

All children whose files were looked at had a personal educational plan (PEP) in place and the service manager said that Lewisham continued to have a high completion rate of PEPs (96%).

The managers and the education professional interviewed, gave evidence of the success and the resources in the service in supporting children and young people to achieve to the best of their abilities.

For example, the welfare call service monitored the attendance of all looked after children and information on attendance was shared with supervising social workers who addressed issues directly with the foster carers. Lewisham council held the annual achievement award ceremony to celebrate the achievement of looked after children in education, sport or the arts. The authority had set targets for improving educational attainment in all groups and was monitoring these. All school heads, schools' designated coordinators and foster carers had received training about expectations in supporting looked after children to achieve. This was an ongoing scheme.

All looked after children and young people had a free pass to Lewisham's leisure facilities and it was planned to extent the scheme. Some carers raised

that some activities, which young people liked to pursue during their free time, were too expensive for the carers to finance.

Family based short-term breaks for children with disabilities were an area that the fostering service was developing rapidly, in partnership with the children with disability team. It had been recognised that it was a valuable service for children and their families and complemented the short breaks residential service provided in the borough.

The fostering social worker (with the lead role in this area) gave evidence of how parents were supported in choosing the carers and in being fully involved in the care plans. The social worker said that all carers fully recognised the role of the birth parents as the main carers. The carer visited confirmed this; she also showed much appreciation for the support she was receiving from the fostering service. (Direct feedback from the children and families involved was not obtained on this occasion).

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10, 11

Quality in this area was good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Maintaining and developing family contact and friendships were integral to the service provided. This was emphasised through the training and support given to carers.

Children's opinions were sought, so as to enable them to contribute to important issues affecting their life and future. Despite the authority's efforts to offer a range of avenues to enable complaints and participation, comments received indicated that some work was still needed in this area.

EVIDENCE:

Children confirmed that appropriate contact with family and friends was supported, that they were listened to and their individuality and differences were respected. They illustrated this with comments such as:

"People respect me for me"

"My social worker understands how I feel and tries to work it out"

"When I have an opinion they listen"

"I speak to my foster carer and a family friend"

"My social worker does take notice of my opinions; if I wanted to tell her something she would write it down and help me with that problem".

The service was committed to maintaining and developing family contact, recognising the central role-played by the child's birth family. The carers' ability to do so and their attitudes towards families whose lifestyles might be very different from their own, was assessed and monitored. Carers'

preparation for fostering emphasised that carers are part of a network, including, where legally allowed and appropriate, birth families.

It was evident from comments from carers, such as: "*The parents are very caring and taking an interest in the baby*", that they worked with families. A new project launched in September 2006 would help Lewisham foster carers to support each other in supervising contact arrangements.

Established advocacy services were available to all looked after children. Children in foster care had received a copy of the children's guide.

Although young people said that they would raise worries with their own family, friends or carers or their social worker, some said that they did not feel able to make a complaint to the authority. This was an issue particularly for those children who had experienced a high turn over or gaps in social work support. For example, one young person said that although she had details of relevant help lines, she would not contact them. She would prefer to speak face to face to a social worker if she had one she could trust. (At the time there had been gaps in social work support. This was being rectified).

It was evident from speaking to staff, management and a representative from the children's advocacy service, that Lewisham had a number of means to enable children to complain. It is possible that the fact that social workers have recently been allocated to all fostered children, if maintained, would make children more confident to complain to the authority. (The delays in receiving notes from statutory reviews - raised by carers and discussed above under safeguarding- would also help in this area, if addressed).

Some comments from carers and children's social workers indicated that they thought that enabling participation of children was a weak point in Lewisham. This was surprising, as in fact the authority gave significant evidence of how they had enabled young people to have a say and had supported children and young people to become more involved.

For example two holidays took place this year for separate age groups. Another activity holiday was going to take place in Autumn 2006, for those looked after children at risk of becoming disengaged from education. Looked after children were trained in recruitment and selection to develop their involvement in the appointment of staff, including social workers and personal advisers.

Managers said that care leavers, through an established user group, have influenced a number of changes including:

- Contributing to the specification of the advocacy service
- Lobbying full council for an increase in the leaving care grant
- Lobbying for an additional personal adviser post

- Writing and producing (supported by Barnados) articles for Lewisham's own magazine for looked after children
- Redesigning the looked after children's review consultation forms
- Presenting to inspectors judging Lewisham's successful Beacon status bid

However the comments, from some children about complaining and from some carers and social workers about involvement, would indicate that the service should continue to consult with children to try to identify what the remaining barriers, if any still, might be. (See recommendation).

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

29

Quality in this area was good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Carers received regular payment of agreed allowances.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service had a written policy on fostering allowances. The service had administrative and financial systems that facilitated prompt and accurate payment to foster carers.

Foster carers generally commented that allowances and agreed expenses were paid.

Some carers raised that they considered the allowances and agreed expenses not to cover the price of quality equipment and of properly funding activities for young people. These comments were related to the managers during the inspection who said that they would follow this up with the Lewisham foster care association.

The manager said that the authority had recently reviewed the remittance advice provided to foster carers to give them a clearer breakdown of the allowances received. Foster carers were due to receive the revised admittance in autumn 2006. The fostering rates scheme was to be reviewed before the end of the financial year, to consider whether the allowances could become more flexible. Clear advice had been given to children's social workers and all looked after children's teams regarding the pocket money and holiday allowances, which looked after children were entitled to.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1, 2, 5, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 32

Quality in this area was excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children benefited from a service that was well managed by a child focused and well-qualified management team. The service manager provided inspired leadership to staff and a clear strategy for supporting and supervising carers.

EVIDENCE:

There was a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the service that was enacted in practice.

The service manager and other senior managers involved in fostering were appropriately qualified and experienced. Lines of accountability were clear. There were regular team and management meetings to promote good communication throughout the service and regular supervision of all social work staff and managers.

The service manager said that the fostering service had worked hard to form positive working relationships with all services responsible for looked after children. The corporate training programme was available to all managers and had been used well. A management workshop was held for the service in 2006 to address all areas of development; a management team development day was held recently with fostering and adoption managers.

The main reason why this area was assessed as excellent was because there was a strong sense of all senior managers and the elected members with responsibility for fostering, working together and using their different roles to enhance the service for fostered children. There was a clear vision, a sound strategy and evidence of the positive outcomes for children that this was enabling. The fostering management team was child focused; it was noted, for example, that during the inspection, when comments from children were related back, managers immediately acted on those to help the child.

The energy, commitment and enthusiasm of all in the fostering team were evident. Because all this was held together by clear strategic management to ensure performance, there was excellent capacity to maintain what had been achieved and to address remaining challenges. The service manager's own assessment of the service demonstrated a clear analysis of the strengths and areas for improvement. Team managers considered the service manager to have given them explicit guidelines on safeguarding, to be skilled at helping with capabilities procedures, supportive, but also appropriately challenging and setting clear expectations.

Representatives of the Lewisham foster care association (LFCA), while highlighting a number of challenges for the service still to address, commented that the service manager was working towards improvement: "*.. Trying to alter perceptions and ways of working... she is able and committed to change things*". The LFCA was very appreciative also of the work of another manager who, with the service manager, had been their main link. The LFCA considered that both managers were trying to build trust. They commented that: "*.. Training was brought to a new level, improved quality,..listened to carers*

and provided what carers needed". While they had less contact with the other two team managers, they had some positive experiences of them also.

The LFCA was anxious, though, that managers and children's social workers might have too much work and this could hinder, they thought, progress in addressing the issues that carers needed to be solved quickly.

The agency had a clear assessment process for carers, which defined the fostering task, the qualities, competencies and aptitudes required from prospective applicants. Each approved carer was supervised by a named, qualified social worker. Inspection of files and discussion with staff indicated that regular visits to carers were made, including unannounced yearly visits.

The majority of carers considered that the authority was enabling them to give their best to the children and young people. For example a carer illustrated this as: *"In my opinion Lewisham fostering service is trying their best for the children and carers. They are one of the best reliable boroughs in the country and they offer superb training for carers".*

Carers said that expectations of them were high, but so was the support received:

"They provide me with all the necessary things the child needs, provide me with moral support, give me training and regular visits"

"I feel we all work together in the interest of the child"

"I have been very lucky over the years in the support I get and I think this is very important"

Two carers who had children who then moved to adoption said that this had been planned well: *"I have found them (the fostering team) excellent and they involved me every step of the way".*

In response to a need identified by foster carers, the service established a number of support groups, including: a black carers group, a Vietnamese carers group and a male carers group.

A group for family and friends as carers was also set up. Although it had made a slow start the fostering service intended to continue to develop this group in recognition of the need for specialised support.

There were 23 family and friends carers. The team manager with the lead responsibility for family and friend carers assured that their assessment was as rigorous as mainstream carers, with more flexibility only about the carers' health and accommodation.

As discussed above in the summary, some carers expressed a number of dissatisfactions with the department. Some were related to the work of other services and particularly of children's social workers. One carer, in particular,

related some negative experiences that had been protracted and were still unresolved.

The issues brought up by carers were related back to management during the inspection. Management was already aware of such issues and discussed the action taken and that was going to be taken, (some, such as rebuilding trust, being a longer term task). The authority needed to establish as a priority a clear complaints' procedure for carers. Carers had been using the council's procedure, but they had been recently advised that such would be inappropriate unless complaining on behalf of a child. (See recommendation).

Individual case records for children were kept. These and other records were held securely and with due regard for confidentiality.

The recent restructuring had resulted in all fostering staff being accommodated in the central premises of the local authority, about one year ago. The working environment had been significantly improved since, both to make it more comfortable for staff and better suited to carry the work of the service.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	3
15	3
30	4

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	4
4	X
5	4
16	3
17	3
18	3
19	X
20	X
21	3
22	3
23	X
24	3
25	3
26	3
27	X
28	X
32	3

no

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

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.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS8	That the authority systematically monitors whether enough information is available to enable sound matching and the appropriate placement of each children with a carer. To this end the authority should also review the different possible sources of information and check that communication is effective to ensure that all that is known about the child is collected.
2	FS8 FS7	That the authority enhances its efforts to promote equality and value for diversity with: - a clearer policy and statement of intent regarding trans-racial and trans-cultural placements; - more information and effective training on diversity for carers.
3	FS15	That carers' files show the manager's decision about whether checks are to be conducted or renewed, with a brief reason. (This would be in relation to people for whom

		whether a check is needed or not might be different from a previous decision or from recent practice).
4	FS15	That staff files are reorganised to make the information easier to find.
5	FS11	That the authority continues to consult with children, young people and their representatives to identify what might be the issues hindering complaining and involvement. This would be so that they can be addressed to the satisfaction of children and young people.
6	FS5	That the authority continues to develop accurate management information that is able to evidence progress in meeting set priorities. For example, regarding recruitment of carers, information that would enable monitoring of what happens at every step, from initial enquiry to approval.
7	FS22	That the authority puts in place a separate complaint's procedure for carers.

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