

# The Fostering Partnership

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Address</b>	Unit 224 The Bon Marche Centre 241-251 Ferndale Road London SW9 8BJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7737 7333
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:contact@thefosteringpartnership.co.uk">contact@thefosteringpartnership.co.uk</a>
<b>Registered person</b>	The Fostering Partnership
<b>Registered manager</b>	Hazel Catherine Mackay
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Gregory Joseph Purkis
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## 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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## 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 Fostering Partnership is an independent fostering agency, conducted by three directors. The main aim is to recruit, supervise and support carers for looked after children and to provide a wide range of placement resources to meet a variety of needs. The agency operates from office accommodation located centrally in Brixton, South London. An additional service was recently established in Manchester, although this is not currently regarded as a separate branch. At the time of the inspection, there were 77 approved fostering households, with a capacity to foster 165 children and 100 children placed.

### Summary

This was an announced inspection conducted over five days. All the key standards were considered. Children benefit from an agency which is child focused and endeavours to operate in their best interest. Children, carers and placing authorities are satisfied with the service. The Fostering Partnership gives excellent support and training to carers, so that they are enabled to promote children's education and health, provide a nurturing home and help them with the challenges they face as part of their daily life. The agency matches children with carers who best meet their assessed needs. This is sometimes weakened by the continuing lack of all relevant information from placing authorities, although this is improving. Assessments of carers are thorough; but reasons for terms of approval in relation to each carer's individual circumstances and skills are not always clear enough. The agency is well managed at all levels and committed to an agenda of improvement. Information management systems and periodic formal reviews of the service are not yet developed enough to fully support a thorough management assessment of the service as a whole and to identify patterns.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### Improvements since the last inspection

The report from the previous inspection detailed three actions and 11 recommendations. These are mostly met. The recruitment procedure for staff and carers is now robust. Carers are provided with signed consent forms for children's emergency medical treatment. Foster care agreements have been reviewed, although their content is not yet consistent with regulations. The agency is now more active in pursuing information from placing authorities about the children, including, for example, health assessments, care and educational plans. However, enough information is not yet consistently obtained at the point of placement. The agency has included in the children's guide clear details regarding entitlement and how to complain. These improvements have been achieved through increased staffing levels as well as commitment, by the directors of the fostering agency, staff and carers, to continue to develop the service and provide positive outcomes for children.

### Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children benefit from an agency that promotes their health and development. For example, children are satisfied with the help and advice that carers give them. Carers ensure that children are registered with a general practitioner, take them to statutory medical reviews, dentist, optician or hospital appointments when needed. Carers support children in considering matters

such as sexual health or the risks associated with drugs or alcohol consumption. If appropriate, they enable informed participation in decisions about health needs. Placements take into account that children must receive appropriate health services and the agency is informed about specialist provision in the area. Children's health is also promoted because supervising social workers, management and the panel carefully monitor carers' effectiveness in supporting healthy and active lifestyles. Carers receive training in health, hygiene and first aid. The agency is prompt at relating to carers all information received regarding a child's health, but this is not always available at the point of placement. When such is the case, the agency liaises with the responsible authority to obtain the relevant documents.

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

The provision is good.

The agency makes a good contribution to promoting children's welfare and to protecting them from abuse and neglect. For example, children say that they feel safe and well cared for. They know how to complain and say that adults listen to their opinions and concerns. Staff and panel members are knowledgeable about fostering and child protection. They are appropriately qualified or experienced for their roles. They are selected consistently with a robust recruitment process, which thoroughly assesses their suitability to work with children. Although records are kept of checks and references, occasionally, how information has been followed up is not clearly documented in the individual files. Children benefit from carers who are thoroughly assessed for their ability to safeguard children and provide them with a healthy and nurturing environment. There is some variation in quality regarding the depth of assessments, in that some lack a clear analysis, although they contain full description of issues and events. Management is addressing this through training and tighter supervision. The panel acts as an additional safeguard for children because it is led by an experienced chair and members have a mix of relevant expertise. The panel gives consideration to relevant issues, so as to enable good quality decisions regarding approval of carers and safeguarding children. The agency endeavours to offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for the child for whom the responsible authority is seeking a placement. This is sometimes weakened by the continuing lack of all relevant information given by the authorities, although it is now improving.

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

The provision is good.

Children benefit from an agency which values diversity and gives high priority to meeting individual educational needs. The Fostering Partnership endeavours to place young people with carers who share their racial and cultural backgrounds, speak their language, support their religion and are positive role models in relation to developing skills for dealing with discrimination. The recruitment strategy is aimed at attracting a wide range of carers from differing ethnic origins, to reflect the changing needs of children referred. Foster carers looking after children with disabilities say that they are well supported. Supervising social workers monitor that carers are effective in encouraging all children to develop their interests and talents, pursue hobbies, engage in varied leisure activities and progress in their education. A number of placements are made where the carer and the child do not share the same cultural backgrounds. This is when there are no carers who reflect the child's ethnic origin, but where other significant considerations make, on balance, the placement suitable nonetheless. Carers are well supported and are confident that they can meet the children's needs. Carers and social workers' training cover diversity. However, there is no clear written policy formalising what the

agency expects to be in place to ensure that children in such placements are able to foster a feeling of self worth and develop a positive identity. Children are satisfied with the help they receive in their education. They are encouraged to achieve consistently with their potential. For example, carers convey much commitment and enthusiasm in this area of their work. They research the most suitable schools; liaise with teachers; help with home work; attend education meetings and speak proudly of young people's achievements. Supervising social workers are active in reminding local authorities and schools when young people's personal educational plans are overdue. The agency contributes financially and through practical assistance to ensure that children do not experience changes of school as a result of their placement. There is still some delay in obtaining school places for some children, particularly asylum seekers who have just arrived to this country.

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

The provision is good.

Children are supported in maintaining relationships by an agency that recognises the importance of appropriate contact arrangements with family members and other significant people. For example, carers are clear of the agency's expectations regarding contact and can demonstrate how they meet these in individual cases. Agreements on contact are arranged with the responsible authority and are included in the placement agreement. The agency offers practical and financial support to carers, to enable contact to take place as planned. For example, where carers are required to travel lengthy distances or where carers are unable to meet the requirement directly due to the demands of other foster children. Children are consulted and enabled to have a say over matters affecting their daily life and their future. For example, they have one to one discussion with their carer or social worker. Children's views inform their own reviews and those of carers. Children know how to complain and carers are clear of their role in advocating for children.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Children benefit from an agency which is child focused and has a clear strategy for supporting and supervising staff and carers. Children, carers and placing authorities are satisfied with the service provided. The Fostering Partnership is open to change and is responsive to suggestions from its stakeholders, research and good practice guidelines. There is a clear statement of purpose and a children's guide, recently amended after consultation with children. However, information management systems and periodic formal reviews are not yet developed enough to enable a thorough management assessment and appraisal of the service as a whole. Lines of accountability are generally well defined, but the division of responsibility at senior level, regarding the operation of the office in Manchester, is not explicit. There is appropriate separation between assessment of carers, consideration by members of the panel and decision-making; however, the wording of some documents does not clearly reflect this. The service is effectively managed and staffed by people who have relevant qualifications, experience and knowledge. There is efficient administration. There is commitment to staff's and carers' development with excellent support and training, particularly for carers. The majority of staff say that they receive very good supervision and that the agency is a competent and fair employer.

However, some consider that there is not sufficient objectivity and independence to enable them to raise concerns fully. Panel members do not receive formal periodic appraisals. Administrative and children's case records are held securely and with due regard for confidentiality. There are guidelines about case recording and about what information is kept, but there are no regular managerial audits of individual files.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
4	establish and maintain a system for formal, periodic review of the quality of care provided, which includes consultation with carers, children in placement and their responsible authority. (Regulation 42)	31 March 2009
22	ensure that foster care agreements are consistent with regulations. (Regulation 28 (5))	30 September 2008

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that comprehensive information about young people is consistently available to enable good matching (NMS 8)
- ensure that all foster carers' assessments include a clear analysis supporting the reasons for suitability and for the terms of approval. (NMS 8)
- set out in writing what the agency expects to be in place, when the carer and the child do not share the same cultural background, to ensure that children's needs are well met. (NMS7)
- define clearly the division of responsibility, at senior level, regarding the operation of the office in Manchester. (NMS 16)
- ensure periodic auditing of records, including case files.(NMS 25)

## Annex

## Annex A

### National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

#### Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

**Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.**

#### 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)

**Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### 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)

**Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### 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)

**Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Achieving economic well-being

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)

**Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.**

#### Organisation

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)

**Annex A**

- 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)

**Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**