

London Borough of Enfield Adoption Service

Inspection report for la adoption agency

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Inspector	Rosemary Dancer
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Date of last inspection	18 December 2006

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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 agency undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption work with children and those affected by adoption. This includes the recruitment, preparation assessment and approval of domestic adopters; the family finding and the matching and placement of children; support to placements both pre and post adoption order; post adoption support to adult adoptees, including intermediary work; post adoption support to relatives of adoptees and support to birth parents whose children will be or have been placed for adoption. The agency also manages direct contact arrangements and a letterbox contact system. For adopters who wish to adopt a child from overseas the agency refers them to an Adoption Support Agency specialising in this work. The agency also has a contract with two Adoption Support Agencies to provide independent support to adoptive families and birth parents of children for whom the plan is adoption.

Summary

At this announced full inspection all of the National Minimum Standards were assessed. The recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adoptive parents is of a good quality and this means that children are placed in safe, stable and secure placements. The preparation provided is particularly comprehensive covering five full days with a range of speakers. The agency provides a very good quality support service to adoptive families with firm plans in place to further develop the services available. The support provided means that outcomes for children are good and adoptive placements are maintained throughout childhood and beyond. The disruption rate for this agency is very low and this is a good indication that families are being well supported. Birth parents and relatives are provided with a support service via one of two independent Adoption Support Agencies the service has contracts with or with social workers who are members of the adoption support team. The take up of these services by birth parents is currently rather low. This is an indication that a rather more proactive approach in encouraging and supporting birth parents in accessing these services may improve the uptake. For adoptees and their birth relatives there is a counselling and intermediary services. This worked is carried out in a very skilled and sensitive way. The agency is managed in a very effective and efficient way. The staff are very well supported by the management team and the other support systems available. Communication between managers and staff and across the teams are especially good. This agency takes a child centred approach to its work, operates very much as a 'team around the child' which helps to ensure that outcomes for Enfield children are good with some very good aspects.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection there were 10 actions made and 18 recommendations. This is an agency which is keen to continually improve practice and views inspection as an aid to this. As a result all of the issues raised at the last key inspection have now been fully addressed and the agency has improved in all areas. The most marked improvements are in evidencing a robust recruitment process takes place, ensuring panel is quorate, the transfer of fostering cases held by the adoption team, the introduction of rolling training for staff in safeguarding, writing assessment reports and the development of a dedicated post adoption team.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency has a recruitment strategy which is informed by the needs of children coming through the system and focuses on recruiting those people who are most likely to be able to meet these, often complex, needs. The agency welcomes all without prejudice although the focus rightly remains on the needs of the children and enquirers are prioritised on this basis. The agency approach to permanency planning is robust and ensures that children are not subjected to unnecessary delay. The arrangements for family finding are good and effective use is made of the local consortium, other agencies and the national adoption register. Where of an age and level of understanding children's views are obtained and are acted upon where possible. People who want to adopt a child from another country are referred to an agency specialising in this type of work which is registered and inspected by Ofsted. The arrangements for the preparation of adopters are very good. A five day preparation course is provided to adopters and a range of speakers and professionals are involved in delivering this course. Adopters felt they had been very well informed about adoption and well prepared to parent a child who may have a range of complex needs. The arrangements for assessing adopters are good. A range of checks are undertaken to ensure that applicants are suitable people to care for children. Assessments of adopters are of a reasonable standard, they are analytical and reach a conclusion about the applicants suitability. The health and safety checklists being used do not include consideration of the risks hanging cords on window blinds may present to a child or of the risk of poisonous plants. In some cases the assessments had not been updated to reflect the adopters current situation when the match was presented to panel. There are careful matching processes in place which ensure that adopters are fully informed about the child's needs. Prospective adopters are fully supported in thinking about any implications these needs may have for the future. This helps to ensure that children are placed with the most suitable adopters who are likely to be able to meet all of their needs into adulthood. Children are informed about adopters they are to be placed with via a DVD of them. This is good practice as it brings the adopters 'alive' to the child before they have met each other. The panel is governed by clear policies and procedures. Adopters are invited to attend panel and overall adopters felt that they had been treated in a respectful and sensitive way. Social workers attend panel to present their case and support adopters through the proceedings. Social workers were of the view that panel gives proper scrutiny to their work. The panel is properly constituted and meets as a quorum. The management and organisation of the adoption panel is efficient and recommendations are made following careful consideration of all required information. Decisions are made in a timely way. However, the decision maker is not routinely reading all of the papers, therefore, does not have a full view about each case or an understanding about how panel reached their recommendations and advice. The Nominated Manager has an up to date criminal records bureau check in place and is suitably qualified and experienced to carry out her role. The procedures for the recruitment of staff overall follow good practice in safeguarding children although they do not include a requirement that references are verified with the writer. However, in practice this occurs. The agency has safeguarding procedures which do not relate to children who are placed for adoption or children receiving an adoption support service. However, practice in respect to safeguarding issues is robust.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency has a strong approach to supporting and maintaining adoptive placements. There are a range of initiatives used to support the development and maintenance of safe, stable and secure placements. The good quality preparation ensures that adopters are well prepared to deal with needs arising from adverse life experiences, the matching processes ensure that adopters are well informed about the child's particular needs and include consideration of support services the child or adoptive parents may benefit from. Social workers continue to support prospective adopters up until an order is granted and since the last inspection a dedicated post adoption support team has been set up. This team works with families to support placements and this means that support is provided in a timely way by people who are skilled, experienced and knowledgeable about the issues involved in adoption. This team also works to educate other professionals working with the child about the needs of children placed for adoption, especially those needs relating to adverse past experiences. These often manifest in behaviour difficulties and result in the child being wrongly viewed as wilfully naughty or disruptive. Adopters are provided with a variety of support services to which all are welcomed. These include a newsletter, an annual event, various training events provided by the agency and consortium, a support group, a buddy system and access to two national adoption support agencies. Adopters felt that they are well supported by the agency, one comment from an adopter reflects the general consensus, 'Fantastic adoption support service....the service has been faultless.' Information, support and advice is provided to adopters who are adopting a child from overseas by a adoption agency also registered and inspected by Ofsted. The agency has access to a range of specialist advice, including medical and legal advice and advice from a multi-disciplinary team which includes educational and mental health services.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency recognises the life long implications adoption has on all parties concerned. The approach taken in working with birth parents and family members is inclusive and non-judgemental. One birth family member commented that the agency, 'Communicates with people on a respectful level.' and another commented, 'They have been very supportive....they always treat me with respect and listen to me.' While some good work is being carried out with parents the take up of the counselling services available through the agency in the early stages of the process is poor. However, birth parents and family members are being involved in the planning for their children's futures where at all possible and comments made by birth parents about the plan for adoption are recorded and if appropriate are acted upon wherever possible. Direct work is carried out with children to prepare them for their adoption placement and for most information is gathered about their early life. Life-story work, including direct work, permanence reports, books and later in life letters are seen as tools in helping a child understand their situation now and in the future. However, life story work is not always being completed in a timely way and permanence reports are not always being updated. The agency helps to maintain the child's heritage through a well-managed and administered letterbox system. There are leaflets provided to participants and help in writing letters can be provided wherever necessary. Some direct contacts are also supported by the agency.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a clear and comprehensive statement of purpose in place which is underpinned by a clear set of policies and procedures which guide its practices. There are two guides to adoption, one for older children and one for the younger age range. These are used to explain to children the adoption process and what it means to them. The current guides do not both include the details of the children's rights director or the details of how to access an advocate. Adopters are provided with good quality verbal and written information, in a timely way. The agency takes an inclusive approach, all sectors of the community are treated with respect and this agency ensures that equality and diversity is promoted in all areas of its work. The management of this agency is good in respect to the strategic and operational aspects of the work. Managers are suitably qualified, experienced and skilled in adoption work and are highly respected by the staff teams. The agency is staffed by people who are highly skilled in their roles and this includes all workers including the clerical staff. There is a strong commitment to providing good quality outcomes for children and this is a service which remains child focused at all times. Adopters' views about the calibre of social workers are very positive. Adopters felt that they are child centred, professional, highly motivated and one adopter commented that, 'all levels from the secretaries to the head of the team are efficient and diligent.' Staff are well supported in their roles through good quality supervision, peer support, good training opportunities and generally through the approachable and supportive management team. The executive takes an involved approach to monitoring and controlling the work of the agency to ensure that good outcomes for children and adults using the services are maintained. The arrangements for clerical support to social workers are effective. Case records have just been transferred to an electronic system but not all staff have an electronic signature. Personnel records are well-maintained and records relating to panel members are kept. The agency had not obtained references in respect to members appointed to panel as independent members. The premises are accessible to the public during normal office hours, including people with a disability. The premises and electronic systems are secure and electronic records are backed up on a daily basis. The agency has a disaster recovery plan in place which relates to both the back up of records and the provision of premises.

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 Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
1	develop the safeguarding procedures to include the safeguarding needs of children in adoptive placements and those who are receiving adoption support service (The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2005, as amended Regulation 9)	15 December 2008
1	include in both of the guides for children the details of how a child may have access to the services of an advocate who is	1 December 2008

independent of the authority and the name, address and telephone number of the Children's Rights Director (Adoption Agency Regulations 2003 (as amended) Regulation 3 (1) Schedule 2)	
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Recommendations

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

- ensure that any risks in prospective adopters' households in relation to issues detailed in the main body of the report are excluded and review and update, where necessary, adopters assessment reports before presentation to a matching panel (NMS 4.6)
- read all reports provided to panel as a part of the decision making process (NMS 13.2)
- promote the independent counselling services available to birth parents and support them in accessing these at an earlier stage of the process (NMS 7.4)
- ensure that life-story work is completed in a timely way and children's permanence reports are kept up to date (NMS 8.2)
- obtain references for independent panel members (NMS 28.1)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for la adoption agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- the agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- adopters are given information about matching (NMS 5)
- the functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10)
- the constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11)
- adoption panels are timely (NMS 12)
- adoption agency decision is made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13)
- the manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15)
- staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19)
- the agency has a robust complaints procedure (NMS 24 voluntary adoption agency only)
- the agency safeguards and promotes the welfare of its service users (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 19, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- the agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)
- services are tailored to meet the needs of people affected by adoption (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 6 and 33 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- the adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)
- Service users receive good quality services based on their needs (NMS 34)

Ofsted considers 7, 8, 9 and 34 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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 written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)

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- Annex A**
- the agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
 - the manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
 - the adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
 - the agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
 - the staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
 - the agency has sufficient staff with the right skills/experience (NMS 21)
 - the agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
 - the agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
 - case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
 - the agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
 - the agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
 - the agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
 - the premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
 - the adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30 voluntary adoption agency only)
 - the adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)
- Ofsted considers 1, 3, 16, 21, 25 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.**