

# Wandsworth Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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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**

In Wandsworth, the responsibility for identifying, responding to and monitoring private fostering arrangements is delegated to the referral and assessment service manager. He is also the decision maker signing off assessments of suitability of those arrangements known to the authority. The function is located in the family and community services' section of children's specialist services. The day-to-day work is conducted by a private fostering principal social worker, responsible to a team manager. The main activities are case work and awareness raising. The Private Fostering Multi-Agency Group, chaired by the service head, monitors how Wandsworth complies with the discharge of its private fostering functions and statutory duties. The multi-agency group is a sub group of the Wandsworth's safeguarding board.

### **Summary**

This was a key, announced inspection, conducted over three days. The authority puts emphasis on responding promptly and appropriately to notifications and on conducting sound and timely assessments, in recognition of how vulnerable children in private fostering arrangements may be. Children and carers are very satisfied with the advice and support they receive. Professionals in the education, health, housing, leisure and social care fields have a shared responsibility to work together to ensure that all privately fostered children are well cared for and are safeguarded from harm. The number of notifications has been low and even minimal from some sources. This impinges on safeguarding because the authority cannot act to promote the welfare of children in unknown arrangements. Wandsworth has conducted a careful review of what awareness raising initiatives have been successful and where the gaps are. The awareness raising campaign has been resumed with new enthusiasm. Diversity is addressed well in case work and is integral to strategic management. Recommendations are made mainly regarding notifications, recording and some information to be made available for children.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

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

This is the first inspection conducted under the National Minimum Standards for private fostering and the children (private arrangements for fostering) regulations 2005.

### **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 authority recognises how vulnerable children in private fostering arrangements may be; thus it puts emphasis on responding appropriately to notifications and on conducting sound and timely assessments. The service provided to individual children and carers is good, with some examples of excellent practice. This also safeguards children because no child is knowingly left in an arrangement that is not suitable. The children safeguarding board is clear about its role in overseeing how the various agencies collaborate to protect privately fostered children. The authority appreciates the complexity of the assessments of suitability. To ensure that case work is conducted well enough to properly and consistently protect and support children, the

private fostering post has been set at principal social work grade. Thus it can attract professionals with the relevant experience, qualifications and ability to work to the high calibre that such function requires. Another initiative now embedded to strengthen safeguarding is that all notifications are taken by the private fostering social worker who then continues with the core assessments and longer-term monitoring visits. Children and carers have remarked on how pleased they are that efforts to maintain consistency in social work support have been effective. Children openly discussed how important this matter is for them and commented, for example: 'I do not want a change of social worker. I would feel uncomfortable with social workers changing and to speak to somebody I do not know'. Carers and children overall receive excellent support. The partnership work between the officers or managers involved in case work and the external professionals represented in the multi-agency subgroup is significant in this. Emphasis is put in ensuring that children's health, leisure and education needs are met and that carers have the necessary advice on financial, legal or housing matters. Much effort is made in ensuring that children have a say and that their wishes and feelings are integral to what service they are offered. For example, children are seen alone during the visits and their views are recorded. They have contact details for the private fostering officer and are advised on how to complain; but they do not have written information about accessing advocacy services. Interviews are undertaken with an interpreter present if necessary. Carers and children praised the service received and discussed how they benefited from it. For example, children said: 'I feel comfortable talking to my social worker'; 'anything that happens she just deals with it'. Children spoke of activities the social worker did 'to help to see if I am happy, comfortable, and safe'. Children said that they are welcomed and found the social worker approachable: 'We used to go to her every day. Somebody else would get annoyed, but she never did. She was always welcoming'. This shows that trusting relationships are being established so that children are able to voice feelings and concerns. Carers commented: 'The social worker is really helpful, when we phone she helps us a lot and keeps us informed of what is happening; for example, about the school place. As a result the child is now at school'. 'Helpful, approachable, nice to talk to, feel comfortable with her'. This shows that carers are enabled to better meet children's needs and children are able to access the services and resources necessary to ensure that their welfare is promoted. Carers also said that should one of their family's children be cared by somebody else, they would be reassured that Wandsworth would properly check that the child is protected. Although for a significant number of children regular contact with parents is not possible, the authority makes efforts to ascertain their views and support ways for children to establish communication, when feasible. For example, the private fostering officer has sought to make contact with the parents through various means, including the use of international agencies or home country services. Most children are placed with members of their extended family, thus maintaining culture and heritage. There are clear expectations of carers in how to promote this crucial aspect of their work, should the child be from a different ethnic origin. In all cases, the monitoring visits seek to ensure that the child's equality and diversity needs are being respected and promoted by the carer and that children are in contact with the relevant agencies to support them, in respect of sexuality, age, gender or disability. The promotion of equality and diversity and monitoring that individual needs of children in private fostering arrangements are met, are also integral to the work of education, health and other professionals in the multi-agency group; there are a variety of established and new strategies being taken to promote this. There is no specific training for carers on equality or other issues pertaining to private fostering. Senior management has in place appropriate systems to respond immediately to serious concerns, including the use of prohibitions, prosecutions or the imposition of requirements. However, the authority appreciates that in most cases lack of notification from

carers is a result of lack of awareness, language barriers, anxiety and cultural differences in considering what family is. Thus there is recognition that to increase self-referrals it is important to establish trust and advertise that the assessments are meant to be a helpful process. Wandsworth has developed various strategies to increase awareness of private fostering legislation and guidance. For example, it has published and reviewed a range of publicity material and specific leaflets, in the main five local community languages, for children, private foster carers, parents and professionals. However, there is no leaflet specifically for younger children and no written information about how children may access advocacy services, although they are advised of this by their social worker. There are no clear details, provided to privately fostered 17 years old young people with disabilities, of the authority's procedure for assessing eligibility for adult community care services. Wandsworth has been prompt in undertaking awareness raising since the implementation of the private fostering regulations. Nonetheless, the number of notifications has been low and even minimal from some sources, such as, for example, general practitioners. Additionally, there have been some gaps in the awareness campaigns. This was during a protracted period when no permanent specialist fostering social worker was in post, although some stakeholders continued targeting their public with information, training and publicity material, nonetheless. Wandsworth is committed to engage with local communities and carers, aiming to increase the numbers of children privately fostered referred to and supported by the authority. It has conducted a careful review of what has been successful and what has to be improved; the awareness raising campaign has been resumed with new enthusiasm. For example, the private fostering officer has undertaken a series of new awareness raising meetings, organised a publicity campaign and sought to set up a consultation group. Such work is done in partnership with a number of community and professional stakeholders who bring their expertise and resources. In particular, awareness raising activities are reported back to the multi-agency group and their effectiveness monitored by the number of notifications and referrals received by the department. There has been a recent successful initiative to more fully involve faith groups, as important potential partners in raising awareness and encouraging notifications.

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

The provision is not judged.

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

The provision is not judged.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The local authority has a written statement of purpose clearly setting out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. Such document, that is backed by information and training for all relevant staff, contributes to ensuring that staff and professional partners are aware of the authority's legal responsibilities. The document does not make reference to training available to private foster carers. There is effective monitoring that the service is conducted consistently with its aims, objectives and the legislation and of the impact of the different initiatives taken. The service manager has an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses, clear identification of priorities and there is a strong commitment to improvement, with realistic steps being taken

to address shortfalls identified. There is commitment to ensuring that the service is appropriately resourced, so as to be able to deal effectively with the projected increase in notifications. There have been some excellent management initiatives, to strengthen the support and protection to children, as discussed above in the report, under safeguarding. The work of the multi-agency sub-group, which comprises professionals from children’s specialist services, health, education, housing, play services and a representative of the voluntary sector, has a key role in supporting case work, strategic management and awareness raising. There is also scrutiny at senior management level because the work of the service is reported to the local safeguarding board and to the director of children's services. There are individual case files for carers and children, which are periodically audited, but the outcome of the audit is not always clearly recorded. There is no written record to show that the decision maker has signed off the core assessment of suitability and that all checks are satisfactorily completed, although such scrutiny happens in practice. There is excellent administrative support with appropriate electronic management information records that enable proper monitoring and tracking. There are records of all visits taken and whether they are conducted on time. The individual visit's report shows whether the child has been seen and if alone. This is not apparent on the monitoring spreadsheets and thus they do not offer an easy and quick way to review this information. Wandsworth is committed to staff retention and the initiatives taken are being effective. There is no defined contingency plan, however, regarding ensuring that the work of the private fostering section can continue without hindrance should key staff leave. The smallness of the team makes such plan useful to ensure continuation of effectiveness, particularly regarding awareness raising. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Most of the present private fostering arrangements are with extended family. Wandsworth carefully considers how to address those needs arising from trauma, coming to live in a country so different from that of origin, language, health and education needs. The work of housing is also key in this as poor housing is a significant issue in private fostering arrangements. Health representatives are passionate about ensuring that those new to Britain do not miss out on services and opportunities. Education, also, is making a very good contribution both to diversity and safeguarding. They monitor what is happening to each individual child in a known private fostering arrangement, who attends school and they have much expertise on diversity in the team. A member of the safeguarding board and of the multi-agency group now attends the Wandsworth multi-faith group. Thus diversity is addressed well in case work and is integral to strategic management.

## 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, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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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):

- review the communication strategy to ensure its effectiveness in reaching all relevant professionals and sectors of the community (NMS 2.1)

- develop an information leaflet suitable for younger children (NMS 6.2)
- clarify eligibility criteria, for adult community care services, for privately fostered young people with disabilities reaching the age of 18 (NMS 6.5)
- include in the written statement on private fostering information about training that is made available to carers (NMS 1.2)
- ensure that there is an accurate written record of events such as signing off assessments by the decision maker or managerial file auditing, with at least a brief indication of the reasons for any decision taken (NMS 7.7)