

Walsall MBC Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

Unique reference number	SC078401
Inspection date	10 December 2007
Inspector	Janet Manders
Type of Inspection	Key

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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

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Local authorities are required to raise awareness of the necessity to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangement and to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people, and reduce any risks to their welfare and safety. Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has recently identified a nominated person for private fostering, who has experience within the safeguarding team. The suitability of placements and carers are to be assessed by workers within the family placement team. Decisions regarding the suitability of private fostering arrangements are considered by a private fostering panel, composed of managers from the safeguarding team, family placement team and vulnerable children's team. The inspector was informed of 10 private fostering arrangements that the authority is aware of in its area.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection, which concentrated on the progress made by the authority in meeting the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. It concentrated on the services ability to keep young people safe and the organisation and management of the service and covered all seven standards. Whilst the authority has appointed a manager to develop the private fostering service, she has only been in post for less than a month. Limited work has been undertaken in respect of raising awareness within the community and with workers in the authority; further work is planned. Workers have not followed correct procedures in assessing the suitability of private fostering arrangements or provided appropriate support to young people and carers. Therefore the service is not providing the necessary safeguards to young people.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the Walsall MBC's Private Fostering Arrangements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The authority has developed policies and procedures to ensure that young people in private fostering arrangements are protected; however, these have only just been developed and had not been followed by workers involved with the private fostering arrangements examined by the inspector. This could potentially put young people at risk. The authority has recently developed leaflets and posters, which have been distributed in the local community to raise

awareness of private fostering arrangements. The Lead Advisor has written to local agencies to inform them of the definition of private fostering arrangements and requesting the opportunity to give further briefings. It is hoped that this will raise awareness of their responsibility to inform the local authority if they believe a private fostering arrangement has not been notified to the local authority. However, as this work has only just commenced it has as yet had little impact on raising awareness in the community. Whilst policies and procedures have been developed to reflect the new legislation, these were not in use at the time of the inspection, with none of the files examined containing notification information. In both cases examined, there was a lack of clarity over who had made the placement. Records would suggest that it was the social worker that was involved in making both placements. In respect of one arrangement the young person's parents had not been spoken to about the arrangements and had not agreed to the arrangement. This could potentially result in the young person being at risk and his needs not being met as his legal status is unclear. Social workers from the Safeguarding and Family Support Services had undertaken the assessment of the young person's needs in respect of the cases examined by the inspector and had also undertaken an assessment of the carer's suitability. However, the recently produced policy states that the suitability report will be undertaken by a member of the family placement team, who has experience of assessing carers' suitability to provide substitute care. Once this assessment has been completed the report is presented to the private fostering arrangements panel. The panel provides a level of independent scrutiny and make recommendations to the department as to the suitability of the arrangements in promoting and safeguarding the young person's welfare. Neither of the assessments of the suitability of arrangements examined by the inspector had been completed within the prescribed timescales and did not include all the required detail to ensure that a young person's needs can be met by the carer. Criminal Record Bureau checks had not been completed for one carer and in respect of the other carers, these had been undertaken but the checks had not been returned some nine months after the placement commenced. This could seriously risk the young person's safety and well-being. It was reassuring that the young person visited by the inspector felt that his needs were being met by the carer and that he was able to have regular contact with his sister. The authority's policies and procedures state that private foster carers, parents and young people should be provided with written information, including nationally and locally produced information and that ongoing support should be given. However, the carer and young person visited had not received any information about the support they could receive nor had information been given as to whom the young person can contact if he has any concerns; this may potentially mean young people are vulnerable and puts them at risk of harm. Records indicate that neither of the young people had been visited in line with the regulations, with only two visits being recorded in a nine month period for one young person and one in an eight month period for the other young person. Support to a young person's parents is provided by the fieldwork team, responsible for the young person. Records indicated that there had been little or no contact with parents of the young people placed. The authority is hopeful that now that a policy and procedures have been developed and workers become aware of these that the practice within the authority will improve.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

Walsall MBC has developed a Statement of Purpose, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out, however it does not include the role of other agencies in assisting the local authority to carry out its duty where they become aware of arrangements that have not been notified to the authority. Additionally the examples of young people who may be privately fostered does not give any examples of arrangements outside of family arrangements, for example young people placed with strangers, where parents are working long or unsociable hours or where a young person is at a language school. A set of comprehensive procedures in respect of private fostering arrangements has been written but social workers acknowledge that they are not fully conversant with the procedures and are not confident that they would be able to recognise a private fostering arrangement. Potentially this could result in privately fostered young people not being identified and protected. Each young person has an individual file; however, private foster carers do not have a separate file, consequently confidential information about private foster carers is kept on the young person's file. Not all required information was included on the files regarding foster carers and young people and there was no evidence of robust monitoring of these files, either by team managers or by the nominated person. This potentially results in young people being put at risk as not all available information is recorded and shared. The nominated person shared with the inspector that an audit tool has been developed to monitor private fostering arrangements to ensure that the authority is carrying out its duties in a satisfactory manner. At the time of the inspection an annual report had not been presented to the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board or the Director of Children's Services, evaluating work in relation to privately fostered children and whether the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how the service co-operates with other agencies in this connection.

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):

- ensure that the criteria for a private fostering arrangement are met, where a young person is clearly placed under other provisions of the Children Act 1989, the appropriate procedures must be followed. Children Act 1989
- visit any young person who is privately fostered and undertake an assessment of the suitability of arrangements within prescribed timescales. NMS 3
- ensure that reports of the suitability of a private foster carer cover all issues identified in Schedule 2. NMS 3
- provide private foster carers with information regarding what support they can expect to receive. NMS 4
- provide young people with information regarding who they can contact if they have any concerns. NMS 6
- include in the statement of purpose information regarding the duties of other agencies and a wider range of examples of private fostering situations. NMS 1
- ensure that all staff are aware of the service's statement of purpose, including their duties in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. NMS 1
- maintain separate files for young people and private foster carers. NMS 7
- monitor records, in a robust way, to ensure that work is undertaken within required timescales and covers all areas identified by the standards and regulations. NMS 7
- present a report to the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the work undertaken. NMS 7
- prepare an annual report for the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board on how the authority satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection. NMS 7

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the local authority is notified about privately fostered children living in its area (NMS 2)
- the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted. (NMS 3)
- private foster carers and parents of privately fostered children receive advice and support to assist them to meet the needs of privately fostered children; privately fostered children are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 4)
- the local authority identifies and provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area (NMS 5)
- children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Privately fostered children are enabled to participate in decisions about their lives (NMS 6).

Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be 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:

- relevant staff are aware of local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering (NMS 1)
- the local authority monitors the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering (NMS 7).

Ofsted considers 1 and 7 the key standards to be inspected.