

Worcestershire County Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Suzanne Young / Carole Moore
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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, to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people and reduce any risks to their welfare and safety. Worcestershire County Council has appointed a part-time senior social worker as the responsible person within the authority for private fostering. This post is located within the fostering service. Initial assessment visits are undertaken by social workers from children's social work teams to identify children's and young people's needs. The assessments of the suitability of arrangements are undertaken by the dedicated senior social worker for private fostering. Decisions regarding the suitability of private fostering arrangements are considered and signed off by the children's service manager. Children and carers are provided with ongoing support and advice from the children's social work operations teams.

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 focussed on the services ability to keep young people safe and the organisation and management of the service and it covered all seven standards. The dedicated senior social worker has undertaken initial awareness raising work within the authority and with local agencies. She has undertaken briefings and consulted with other professionals to ensure they are aware of the meaning of private fostering arrangements and their role in identifying them and ensuring the safety of any young person placed within a private fostering arrangement. There have been 73 private fostering arrangements notified to the authority since 2005. The only areas of concern were the very few referrals received from black and ethnic minority communities with regard to private fostering and the zero return from boarding schools. This suggests the authority has not moved far enough in raising their awareness of private fostering within these groups and is not providing the necessary safeguards to children and young people. Children and young people are supported by the Integrated Services for Looked-After Children (ISL) who offer support and advice about educational needs, health and community and leisure opportunities. This is good practice and promotes the general welfare of privately fostered children and young people.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of Worcestershire County Council's Private Fostering Arrangements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people are generally kept safe by the local authority. Young people who are placed with private foster carers are generally being identified and therefore appropriately protected and supported. Children and young people in private fostering arrangements are being identified because the local authority has given sufficient time and resources to raising awareness of private fostering arrangements. Following the appointment of the senior social worker for private fostering in 2005 and the distribution of leaflets there has been a large increase in the number of notifications suggesting that the authority has raised both staff and public's awareness of private fostering. The authority has developed a basic leaflet and poster to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements and the action that should be taken. This leaflet is available in different languages and formats. The authority further promotes the protection of privately fostered children and young people by ensuring all are aware of the actions to take when becoming aware of a private fostering arrangement. The dedicated social worker for private fostering undertakes briefings regarding private fostering arrangements to all social work teams and consults with them on a regular basis. Training is provided through safeguarding board seminars. She consults with professionals to ensure that those who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in the identification and notification of private fostering arrangements. She has also sent out separate letters to private schools asking for a return response. The dedicated social worker has also been in contact with other authorities and attended special interest group in private fostering in order to raise her own awareness. Of concern, is the zero return from private schools and very few referrals from black and ethnic minority communities. Although attempts have been made to make contact the lack of referrals from these areas suggests the authority has not moved far enough in raising their awareness of private fostering and is not providing the necessary safeguards to children and young people within these groups. The local authority has developed appropriate notification documents to ensure they receive all appropriate information regarding a young person who may be privately fostered. They have also recently developed a pro-forma agreement to be used by carers and parents. This clearly identifies how the young person's needs will be met and includes the length of time the placement is expected to last, contact arrangements, medical consent and arrangement for financial support of the young person. This is not in place however for the private fostering arrangements made prior to the introduction of this form. On receiving notification of a private fostering arrangement either the young person's social worker if the case is active, or a duty social worker, is responsible for undertaking an initial assessment to identify the young person's needs and to ensure that they can be met by the proposed or actual arrangements. Children's and young people's safety however is compromised, as initial visits are not routinely taking place within the required seven days. The dedicated private fostering social worker is responsible for undertaking an assessment of the carers to ensure that they are suitable to provide care for the young person to be placed or who has already been placed. These assessments are of a good standard covering all areas as required by the regulations including Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. Once this assessment has been completed a report is presented to the children's' service development manager for the arrangement to be signed off. Where concerns are raised these are discussed at a meeting with both the fostering and children's service managers. The dedicated social worker conducts a review of each private fostering arrangement on an annual basis to ensure that young people continue to be kept safe. Children and carers are provided with ongoing support and advice from the children's social work operations teams who are also responsible for providing advice where needed to the parents of young people who are privately fostered. Regular support visits to children and young people however are not always undertaken within the required timescales. Children and young people are also supported by the Integrated Services for Looked-After Children (ISL)

who offer advice and signposting about educational needs, health and community and leisure opportunities. Young people are also offered extra educational support through ISL. This is good practice and promotes the general welfare of privately fostered children and young people. The authority has produced a young person's guide to being privately fostered in consultation with privately fostered young people. This is good practice and ensures young people who feel vulnerable are able to contact someone to keep themselves safe.

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 satisfactory.

Young people's safety, welfare and care is generally safeguarded because relevant staff are aware of the procedures for private fostering arrangements and managers undertake regular quality assurance monitoring of the service. Worcestershire local authority has appointed a social worker within the family placement team with designated responsibility for the oversight of private fostering arrangements. This appointment was made in 2006 and is for 18½ hours per week to undertake the assessments, raise awareness of private fostering and undertake training of staff. The authority 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. Each young person and private foster carer has an individual file which includes the required information. Children and young people's welfare is compromised however, as the arrangements for the consent to medical treatment is not on file for all privately fostered children and young people. The local authority has in place monitoring processes to ensure that the service offered to young people adequately protects them. They have developed processes to help improve the timescales in which young people are assessed and visited. Children and young people's files are monitored by operational children's team managers as part of their general monitoring processes. An annual report is written by the appointed social worker and submitted to the safeguarding board. She also completes statistical returns which are submitted to the safeguarding board and sent to the children's services integrated leadership team on a quarterly basis. To further ensure that young people are appropriately protected the dedicated social worker regularly meets with the manager of the safeguarding board and the operational manager for fostering to monitor and improve the quality of the service. These processes have been able to raise the prospective awareness of private fostering in members of the safeguarding board and throughout children's services.

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 the arrangements for the length of time the placement is expected to last, contact arrangements, medical consent and arrangement for financial support of the young person is in place for all privately fostered children.(NMS 3.2)
- ensure initial visits take place within the required timescales.(NMS 2.3.1)
- ensure support visits to children and young people are undertaken within required timescales.(NMS 6.1)
- raise the awareness of private fostering in private schools and in the black and ethnic minority communities.(NMS 2.2.2).

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.