

# Southwark LA Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Elisabeth Brunton
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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**

Private fostering in Southwark is dealt with by the locally based NCH project 'Family Plus' in partnership with Southwark Social Services. The project is currently staffed by a manager, two social workers and an administrator. At the time of the inspection, 32 young people were known to be in private fostering arrangements

### **Summary**

The service has done well at disseminating information and raising awareness about private fostering. Referrals of privately fostered young people have increased and are dealt with promptly. The suitability of arrangements is thoroughly checked and assessed. Young people are visited but not always as regularly as required. Information and advice is also given to private foster carers and parents. Managers and staff are knowledgeable and training and written guidance is provided. There is a current statement of purpose and comprehensive file records are maintained. Monitoring of the work is thorough and the required reports on private fostering have been prepared.

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.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

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

The provision is good.

The NCH project and the London Borough of Southwark have done well at raising awareness about private fostering within council and partner services and the local community. There is an ongoing programme of communication activities and links have been established with other services and community groups. A range of publicity materials are used, including eye-catching and informative leaflets. Private fostering is given a high profile within the council through the involvement of senior managers and the local safeguarding children's board. The number of referrals of private fostering arrangements has steadily increased over the past three years. The service responds promptly to new referrals of private fostering arrangements. Initial visits are made jointly by social workers from the NCH project and the council's children's referral and assessment service. Young people are seen on initial visits, the necessary matters covered and safeguarding issues prioritised. Subsequent visits are made to young people in private foster homes but these are not always as frequent as required by the regulations. The need to prohibit private fostering arrangements, impose requirements or disqualifications has not so far arisen in Southwark but the necessary guidance is in place. The suitability of private fostering arrangements is determined through initial and core assessments. Assessments are comprehensive and normally completed within the national assessment framework timescales. Young people are seen and their views are also sought through questionnaires. Feedback is

given by schools and young people's wishes and feelings are included in assessment reports. Checks on adult members of private foster carers' households are made with the Criminal Records Bureau and health and safety checks of their homes undertaken. Parents are contacted wherever possible in order to ascertain their views. Completed assessments are signed off by managers. Some private fostering arrangements are not regarded as suitable by the NCH project and responsibility then passes to the council's children's service. Protocols are in place for dealing with these cases and work is undertaken in order to reach satisfactory outcomes for young people. However, negotiations between different parts of the service can occasionally be protracted, resulting in some delay over subsequent visits to young people, as mentioned above. Private foster carers are provided with ongoing support and advice over matters such as housing and immigration issues, health and personal matters. They are also encouraged to facilitate contact between young people and their families. Information is shared about other services available and contact details for the allocated social worker are given. Private foster carers confirm that the help and support given has helped them meet the needs of young people in their care. Staff turnover has resulted in frequent changes in allocated social workers in some cases. The service acknowledges this and the staffing situation has recently stabilised. Limited financial assistance is given to private foster carers, normally as one-off payments for items such as bed, bedding and clothing. Training is made available to private foster carers and there are plans to encourage the uptake of this. The service works hard to obtain contact details for the parents of privately fostered young people. Parents are provided with a dedicated information leaflet, advice and information. Extensive help is given to some parents by social workers from the council's children's services, in order to remove the necessity for private fostering. Young people receive comprehensive written information about private fostering. Advocacy services are available but privately fostered young people do not have contact details for this service. The service recognises this gap and plans to address it. Young people have contact details for their social workers and say that they receive good support. Some privately fostered young people receive quite intensive support from the council's children's services and are referred to other agencies for additional help, where necessary. There are plans to offer support to young people beyond the age of 16.

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

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

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

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The council has an up-to-date statement of purpose for private fostering. The statement is informative but does not include information about the advice and support made available to private foster carers, young people and their parents or about the training offered. Managers

and staff with particular responsibility for private fostering have sound knowledge and understanding of the council's duties and functions in this area of work. Information has also been shared with other relevant staff. Private fostering is included in the induction training for all new staff and policy, procedure and other written guidance is in place. Comprehensive and separate records are maintained for each private foster carer and privately fostered young person and those reports required by regulation are on file. Records are maintained about the numbers of private fostering arrangements identified within the borough and the responsible manager confirms that the required returns are made to the Department for Children, Schools and Families. Private fostering work is monitored through managerial supervision and oversight of individual case files and regular sample audits in relation to the National Minimum Standards. The council's commissioning arrangements with NCH and the effectiveness of their work on private fostering is also regularly monitored. A comprehensive report describing the council's private fostering work has recently been provided for the Director of Children's Services and the chair of the local safeguarding children board.

## 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 subsequent visits to privately fostered young people are made in accordance with the regulations. (Regulation 8.1)
- provide privately fostered young people with information about advocacy services and the council's arrangements for providing advice and assistance beyond the age of 16. (NMS 6)
- amend the council's statement on private fostering to include all the recommended matters. (NMS 1.2)

## 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.**