

Rochdale Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Lynn O'Driscoll / Sharon Lloyd
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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

Rochdale children's services assesses and approves carers willing to provide private fostering to children and young people. The main reasons for these arrangements are to meet the needs of adolescents temporarily estranged from their parents and for children from overseas whose parents are not resident in this country. Ongoing professional family support is offered to children, young people, carers and parents to help to maintain successful placements until they are ready to return to the family home or to move on into independence.

Summary

This judgement best reflects the fact that the service has made good progress in respect of raising awareness about private fostering arrangements, but religious and community organisations and places of worship have not been targeted. It also acknowledges timely assessments in line with the Regulations, but they are not comprehensive and do not consider the five outcomes for children and young people. There are effective systems in place for monitoring notifications and placements and for auditing files but no review system has been set up. Rochdale is committed to developing and improving the support to children and young people living in private fostering arrangements and in particular to increasing consultation opportunities.

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 the private fostering arrangements in Rochdale.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no key standards in respect of this outcome but it is reported on in some detail in the 'Staying Safe' section.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The service has made good progress in promoting awareness in Rochdale about private fostering. The publicity is available in a range of formats and clearly explains the legal definition of a private fostering arrangement and who to contact in the local authority for more information. A wide range of agencies within the borough has already been targeted but to date this has not included religious and community organisations and places of worship. Front line health staff are also not satisfactorily aware of their responsibilities to notify. The authority recognises that promoting awareness of private fostering arrangements is an ongoing process and the publicity will be re-launched every year. Efficient and appropriate action is taken on receipt of a notification and visits undertaken in accordance with the regulations. Criminal record bureau checks are undertaken on all members of the proposed carer's household who are over 16 years. Decisions about the suitability of arrangements are made within the required legal timescales and signed off by a manager. Disqualifications are handled effectively and to date there are no appeals to decisions made. Although timely assessments are undertaken, they are not

sufficiently detailed and none comment on all five outcomes for children. Health and safety information is limited and risk assessments are not in place. Bedroom arrangements are not always looked at and not all members of the household consulted. Overall there are satisfactory arrangements in place to help ensure children and young people in private fostering arrangements are adequately safeguarded and their welfare is promoted. Specific health needs are reported on during the assessment process and carers confirm they receive sufficient information to help meet those needs. The looked after children's nurse will visit children and young people in placement and offer advice and support to carers. Social workers confirm that placements meet young peoples' physical and emotional needs. The young people are registered with a doctor and receive treatment when needed and immunisations are up to date. They are also encouraged to eat healthy diets and take plenty of exercise. However, not all privately fostered children have a dentist and some are not receiving regular eye checks. Children in private fostering arrangements are happy with the support they receive from the service. All are allocated a social worker who visits at least every six weeks and offers advice and support as needed. Some records are in particular good order and address the 'Every child matters' outcomes. Rochdale children's services are committed to improving consultation opportunities for privately fostered children. Most young people confirm they are listened to and their opinions respected but not all children, however, are seen alone and their views sought. Moreover, some contact arrangements are also being made at the discretion of parents and carers and children are not actively involved in these decisions. There is also no system in place to review private fostering arrangements. Young people are happy and feel safe in their placements. One wrote, 'I have not felt this happy for ages. I love living with [name of carer] and I like her family. She is very supportive to me. She makes me feel at home at all times. We have all bonded and get on very well. She treats me like part of her family.' Some young people, however, do not know how to make a complaint should the need arise and there are no details about advocacy services available on the private fostering leaflets. The authority is currently actively recruiting for independent visitors recognising this is a gap in the service offered to privately fostered children. Overall, carers are satisfied that they too receive the support they need to successfully maintain young people in private fostering arrangements but they do not receive any specific training in this role. Clear and signed foster care agreements are in place but some are not being adhered to especially in relation to financial arrangements which can put undue stress on a placement.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Overall, there are satisfactory arrangements in place to help privately fostered children and young people reach their potential. The service actively promotes and supports the education of children in private fostering arrangements resulting in some good outcomes. For example, one social worker wrote, 'since coming into this placement the child's attendance at school has improved dramatically as a result of continuous encouragement given by the carer'. Young people really appreciate the fact that carers successfully help them to return to school and support their continued attendance. They also receive age appropriate advice about their future careers from Connexions. Children have a good selection of age appropriate toys and also enjoy taking part in constructive activities outside the placement. The authority's 'youth improvement programme' actively helps to organise and support a range of activities. This is not reflected in files however and the assessments do not have sufficient information about hobbies, interests and talents which can boost confidence and self esteem.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no key standards in respect to this outcome but it is reported on in some detail in the 'Staying Safe' section.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no key standards in respect to 'economic wellbeing' so this outcome area was not assessed in any detail.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Staff at different levels of the authority say that Rochdale is a good employer and their managers are approachable and supportive. Those with specific responsibility for private fostering arrangements are suitably qualified, very experienced, knowledgeable and child focussed. They work very well together ensuring a continuity of service for children, carers and parents and planned introductions of new workers to the families. In particular Rochdale provides a very efficient open referral route back into the assessment team from the longer term teams should the need arise. The policy and procedural guide is up to date and includes the legal definition of a private fostered child and the local authority's duties and functions. There are also clear guidelines in place for staff to follow and a user friendly flowchart for quick reference. Staff were initially briefed in team meetings and supervision but the duties and functions are not included during the induction of new staff. Generally social workers have a good understanding about their own particular roles but less about the overall responsibilities of the authority. The safeguarding board also appears not to be sufficiently informed. To date, the authority has not produced a report to the board on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted. Similarly, a written report has not been presented to the Director of Children's Services which includes an evaluation of outcomes in relation to privately fostered children. Good quality assurance monitoring systems are in place including the auditing of case files. Generally, these are in good order but some administrative details are missing, for example, the date an assessment commenced, so it is not possible to check that regulatory timescales are always adhered to. Records of new notifications, approved carers and numbers of children in private fostering arrangements are well maintained.

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):

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- make suitable arrangements to ensure all privately fostered children and young people are registered with a dentist (NMS 3.2.7)
 - ensure all assessments are in sufficient detail to ensure children are adequately safeguarded, their welfare is actively promoted and their self confidence is increased (NMS 3.2.3)
 - include health and safety checklists and risk assessments as part of the assessment process and review and update these at least annually (NMS 3.3)
 - ensure a suitable system is in place to regularly review private fostering arrangements (NMS 3.2.5)
 - ensure suitable advocacy services are accessible to privately fostered children (NMS 6.4)
 - ensure all privately fostered children know how to make a complaint (NMS 7.8)
 - consider providing specific training to private foster carers (NMS 4.6)
 - ensure bedroom arrangements are checked during the assessment process and wishes and feelings of family members are ascertained if bedrooms are to be shared (NMS 3.2.6)
 - ensure a range of suitable consultation opportunities are in place for privately fostered children and young people (NMS 3)
 - consider including private fostering arrangements on induction training for new staff (NMS 1.4)
 - provide a written report to the Director of Children's Services which includes an evaluation of outcomes in relation to privately fostered children (NMS 7.9)
 - provide a report to the safeguarding board on how the local authority satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted and including how it cooperates with other agencies in this connection (NMS 7.10)
 - ensure basic administrative details are included on the documentation to effectively monitor that regulatory timescales are always adhered to. (NMS 7.6)

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.