

Walsall MBC Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for local authority private fostering services

Inspection date	19 January 2011
Lead inspector	Stella Henderson
Type of inspection	Key
URN	SC078401

Service address	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, 139-143 Lichfield Road, Walsall, WS1 1SE
Telephone number	0845 111 2834
Email address	
Nominated person	Amanda Owen

© Crown copyright 2011

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be freely reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided the source and date of publication are stated.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to judge the quality of local authority private fostering services to promote and safeguard children's and young people's welfare.

The key 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

Information about the services

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council's private fostering service is responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are privately fostered.

These arrangements are delivered through the council's specialist children's services. The head of service for safeguarding and the operations manager for review and child protection have lead roles and are primary contacts for the local authority's private fostering service.

Private foster carers and the children and young people they care for are supported by social workers in the Vulnerable Children Service and Family Placement Team who undertaken assessment on adult carers.

Information on private fostering is provided on Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council's website. This is in addition to local publicity and awareness raising campaigns.

Summary

The services were judged to be Good

Improvements/developments since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider was asked to improve practice with regard to procedures relating to visits to privately fostered children and young people, and make amendments to the Statement of Purpose, case files and the monitoring of records.

Additional recommendations were also made in relation to raising staff awareness of their duties and the provision of reports to the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

It was also recommended that information about private fostering was provided for private foster carers, children and young people, and their parents.

Evidence from this inspection demonstrates that these recommendations have been met.

The effectiveness of the services

The overall effectiveness of the private fostering services

The local authority provides a private fostering service that is good and effective. Children and young people say that they feel safe and happy in their placements and they know who to contact if they have any concerns.

Private foster carers are suitably vetted to ensure that they have the ability to meet the needs of the children and young people they are caring for. Assessments take into account contact arrangements with parents, financial considerations and whether placements offered will provide children and young with good standards of physical safety and security.

Increasing numbers of enquiries and notifications about private fostering from a range of sources shows that awareness-raising strategies are having some impact. There is effective monitoring and scrutiny of the private fostering service, enabling managers to identify those areas where the service needs further improvement.

	Judgement
The overall effectiveness of the private fostering services	Good

The quality of the service

The local authority has an effective communication strategy for raising awareness of private fostering. This is achieved in a number of ways, such as by information on its own website, newsletters, direct correspondence and briefings.

It is evident that this strategy is having a positive impact. Enquiries and notifications about private fostering come from universal and other sources, such as parents, the immigration service, and private foster carers themselves.

The local authority is also successful in disseminating information to 'hard to reach' groups, such as the travelling community, and has identified the need to increase contact with faith groups in the community.

Private foster carers say that the local authority provides them with good guidance, advice, information and support. They have found this information to be helpful, and comment very positively on the support received from social workers.

Young people confirm that they receive regular visits from social workers, and are seen alone. They know who to contact if there is a problem, and private foster carers confirm they have information about the local authority's complaints procedures.

	Judgement
The quality of the service	Good

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children and young people

Young people say they feel safe in their placement. They confirm they have regular visits from their social workers, are seen on their own in private and know who to contact if they feel worried about anything.

Children and young people in private fostering placements are registered with a doctor, and receive support from additional services if required. Contact arrangements with parents are clear, and suitable plans are made for young people who move on from private fostering placements.

Thorough scrutiny of the suitability of private foster carers ensures that young people are cared for in placements that are assessed to be safe. Private foster carers commented on the thoroughness of these assessments and the helpfulness of the social workers and foster placement officers involved.

In the majority of cases, the local authority responds to notifications promptly within required initial timescale. A full assessment is then undertaken but meeting timescales for this part of the process is less timely.

An acceptance panel makes a recommendation on suitability. Although this is a valuable layer of scrutiny and quality assurance, this also adds to delays in the senior manager making a final decision about the suitability of private fostering arrangements. A recommendation is therefore made to improve the timeliness of decision making.

	Judgement
Safeguarding and promoting welfare	Good

Promoting equality and tackling discrimination

Children and young people's assessments clearly reflect their individual needs. Private foster carers can access additional and specific training or support if necessary to assist them in meeting children and young people's needs.

The local authority has a good understanding of local community and faith groups, including new emerging communities. They have identified a need to improve communication with these groups to alert them to their legal obligations in relation to private fostering.

	Judgement
Promoting equality and tackling discrimination	Good

The quality of leadership and management

The lead officer and nominated individual for private fostering provide effective leadership of the private fostering service. They ensure that staff in the local authority and partner agencies are fully informed, through training and briefings of their role and responsibilities.

Management ensure that effective partnership working is in place, and resources are carefully deployed to benefit children and young people benefit in private fostering placements.

There is good monitoring of private fostering arrangements, and a number of mechanisms are in place to scrutinise and improve performance. There is continual evaluation of the service, and the service reports annually to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board, who comment favourably on the progress made since the last inspection.

	Judgement
The quality of leadership and management	Good

Capacity to improve

The lead managers have made significant improvement since the last inspection. Procedures and processes have been reviewed and improved upon, and there is an ongoing commitment to continuous development of private fostering services.

This demonstrates that the service has the capacity to respond to any shortfalls identified and quickly drive forward further improvement.

	Judgement
Capacity to improve	Good

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations to improve the quality and standards of the local authority's private fostering services

This section sets out the recommendations to improve the quality and standards of the local authority's private fostering services.

Type	Recommendation
NMS	make decisions about the overall suitability of arrangements within required timescales (NMS 3.4)