

Thurrock Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Pat Stanton
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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 arrangements are not regulated services, they are private arrangements between parents and carers, and the purpose of inspection is to ascertain that the local authority is appropriately fulfilling its functions and duties with regard to overseeing and monitoring the placements of young people who are privately fostered. The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering came into force in July 2005. Thurrock Private Fostering Arrangements Service is 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, to help reduce any risks to their welfare and safety. Thurrock private fostering is based within the Thurrock Fostering Service, in the The Civic Centre, Grays Essex.

Summary

This was an announced full inspection which concentrated on the progress made by the authority in meeting the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and the Service's ability to keep children and young people safe. All seven National Minimum Standards (NMS), relating to private fostering, are grouped under staying safe and organisation. All seven key standards were inspected. The inspector was informed of 8 private fostering arrangements that the authority is aware of in its area. The service is judged as satisfactory in Staying Safe and Organisation. The Private Fostering Arrangements Service forms part of the Thurrock Fostering Service. Private foster carers are recruited, assessed, trained, supervised and supported and reviewed in line with National Minimal Standards. The Registered Manager of Thurrock Fostering Arrangements Service is responsible for private fostering and has a nominated person for private fostering, who has experience within safeguarding but no specialised private fostering training. Decisions regarding the suitability of private fostering arrangements are considered by Thurrock fostering panel who are qualified to approve private foster carers. Some work has been undertaken in respect of raising awareness within the community and with workers in the authority; further work is planned. The authority has made good progress in following the correct procedures in assessing the suitability of private fostering arrangements and provides appropriate support to children, young people and carers to help safeguard children and young people. Areas for development identified at this inspection included: developing appropriate written information for privately fostered children; the robustness of the monitoring the service; the production of detailed reports to the Director of Children's Services and Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board about how the service safeguards children in the area; ensuring all notifications contain relevant information set out in Schedule 1 and that all private foster carers undertake child protection and safe caring training.

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 Thurrock's Private Fostering Arrangements Service.

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 satisfactory.

Thurrock has undertaken some successful awareness raising in relation to private fostering recently by developing leaflets and posters, which have been distributed in the local community; these include leaflets with a help line for language translation. Thurrock has written to local agencies to inform them of the definition of private fostering arrangements and completed an advertising campaign. Further briefings in schools, churches and local ethnic groups in the community are planned. It is hoped that this will help enhance awareness of the responsibility to inform others about private fostering arrangements. The local authority is notified about privately fostered children living in its area and appropriate responses made, however not all required information with regard to notifications as set out in Schedule 1 are recorded. The welfare of privately fostered children is generally safeguarded and promoted by Thurrock's fostering policies and procedures. These are not specialised to private fostering but contain information that reflects new legislation. Assessments for private fostering are comprehensive and include all relevant information completed by the social worker, who presents carers and assessments to Thurrock's fostering panel. The panel provide a level of independent scrutiny and make recommendations to the department as to the suitability of the arrangements to help promote and safeguard children and young people's welfare. The panel was inspected by Ofsted on 26/03/2008. The panel chair confirms assessments are impressively detailed and the carers do contribute to annual reviews. Good working relationships help to ensure carers are able to meet the needs of children in their care. Assessments of suitability are completed normally within the prescribed timescales. Sampled files contain all relevant information to ensure that privately fostered children and young people's needs are met by the carer including, household reviews to ascertain the safety of the home environment in which the child is living. If the environment is not deemed to be safe, recommendations are made to the carer on how to keep the child safe. The agency completes checks on all private foster carers, however, not all Criminal Record Bureau checks are in place due to a delay in processing systems. Privately fostered children and young people are able to access information and support when required. Children and young people are positive about their carers and the fostering service, confirming that they feel safe, have their needs met and have regular contact with family. Comments include "I have been here since I was a toddler and they treat me like there own", "I feel safe and happy with my carers". Children and young people say they receive support from the social worker who sees them alone on home visits and gives them contact details, in case they have any concerns. Records indicate children and young people are visited in line with the regulations. Support to a young person's parents is offered by the social worker, responsible for the young person. Records indicated that there is contact with parents of the children and young people placed.

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.

Staff have a general awareness about the local authority's duties & functions in relation to private fostering but have not had sufficiently specific training to equip them to carry out their responsibilities in full accordance with legal requirements. The newly appointed social worker responsible for private fostering has experience in child protection and has support from the fostering team and Registered Manager. The Registered Manager of the service is registered with the General Social Care Council and has appropriate experience in Social Care Management plus the National Vocational Qualification Level 4, Registered Managers Award. The agency has produced a good leaflet for professionals and the general public about important information regarding foster care which covers 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 and assists in ensuring privately fostered young people are identified and protected. Thurrock 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. The Statement of Purpose states the service offers training in child protection and safe caring to private foster carers, although at the time of inspection no training had been completed. This may compromise the safety of private fostered children and young people in care. Private foster carers are aware of the complaints procedure in case they are dissatisfied with the service they are receiving from the local authority. Thurrock has not yet produced a dedicated information pack for either children in private foster care or carers providing private foster care, nor has it developed a quality assurance and monitoring system to evidence how it monitors the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. Each child or young person has an individual file; however, not all foster carers have a separate file, consequently confidential information about private foster carers is kept on the young person's file. Files contain all required information regarding foster carers and children but there was no evidence of robust monitoring of these files, either by team managers or by the nominated person. The Registered Manager shared with the inspector that an audit tool has been developed to monitor private fostering arrangements but this has not been implemented. At the time of the inspection an annual report has been presented to the Thurrock Safeguarding Children Board or the Director of Children's Services, evaluating work

in relation to Thurrock Fostering Service which includes some information about the privately fostered arrangements, however, this is not detailed and does not evidence whether the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, and 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):

- provide privately foster children with written information, in formats appropriate to their age and level of understanding, about their private foster carer and his responsibilities, the meaning of private fostered status and their right to be safeguarded (NMS 6.2)
- develop processes for robustly monitoring the service. (NMS 7.7)
- present a report to the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the work undertaken. (NMS 7.9)
- prepare a report annually to 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 7.10)
- ensure notifications contain relevant information as set out in Schedule 1 (NMS 2.3)
- ensure private foster carers are given the opportunity to utilise any training in child protection and safe caring (NMS 4.6).
- provide training to front line staff responsible for the assessment and monitoring of private fostering arrangements to equip them to carry out their visiting and recording responsibilities in full accordance with legal requirements (NMS 7.2, 1.3)

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.