

Plymouth C.C. Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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| Inspector | Romana Young |
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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

Plymouth City Council has established a private fostering arrangements service to undertake its statutory duties and functions with regard to safeguarding children and young people who are being privately fostered and promoting awareness of the notification requirements. The private fostering arrangements service is based in the same office as Plymouth City Council's fostering service and is managed by the service manager and a team manager from the local authority's fostering service. There is a designated social worker for the private fostering arrangements service who undertakes the required assessment and monitoring visits. In the year up to 31 March 2007, Plymouth City Council received 18 notifications of new private fostering arrangements, 72% of which involved adolescents temporarily estranged from their parents. In the same period, Plymouth City Council received nine notifications of the termination of a private fostering arrangement, of which 67% involved adolescents temporarily estranged from their parents. In all of these cases, the children and young people and their parents were resident in this country.

Summary

This is the first inspection of Plymouth City Council's private fostering arrangements against the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, which came into force on 1 July 2005. This was an announced key inspection. All seven National Minimum Standards were inspected and judged to be met. The inspector found that the service is operating to an excellent standard overall. There were a number of areas in which practice and the organisation of the service were found to be outstanding. The service is now well-organised and resourced. There is a strong focus within the service on ensuring that the welfare of children and young people who are privately fostered is properly safeguarded and promoted. All the staff working in the service are qualified social workers experienced in working with vulnerable children and young people. Staff are committed to delivering a high quality service to privately fostered children and young people, their parents and private foster carers. The service has excellent links with other services for children and young people, ensuring that privately fostered children and young people have good access to health and other services they require. The local authority has produced very good materials to publicise the notification requirements and provide information for parents, private foster carers and children and young people who are privately fostered.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Plymouth City Council has introduced a number of measures to raise awareness of the private fostering notification requirements within the local community and among groups of

professionals who may, in the course of their work, come into contact with children and young people who are, or may be, being privately fostered. In 2005 Plymouth City Council, in partnership with other local authorities in the South West, mounted a media campaign and produced and distributed a range of publicity materials about private fostering to highlight the introduction of the new legislation, the need to safeguard children and young people living with someone other than a parent or close relative and encourage notifications to be made. Posters and leaflets continue to be distributed widely to key locations and groups within the city, for example, to other statutory services such as the Police and Probation services, relevant council offices, health services, voluntary agencies, faith groups, state and private schools and colleges, language schools, the armed forces, immigration services and refugee organisations. Plymouth City Council's website has a useful and informative web-page about private fostering, which incorporates a link so that notifications can be made online. The local authority also regularly places advertisements in local community publications to raise awareness and provide information on how a notification can be made. The local authority now has sound and robust systems in place for responding to notifications, or information received about a possible private fostering arrangement, and ensuring that visits are subsequently carried out in accordance with the regulations, so that children and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted. There are also excellent follow-up procedures being operated to ensure that children and young people are being safely cared for when a private fostering arrangement ends. The local authority has clear procedures for dealing with situations where it is not satisfied that a child or young person's welfare is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded or promoted by a private fostering arrangement. There is a thorough assessment process used to determine the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations. Staff working for the service are experienced and qualified social workers with excellent knowledge and understanding of the relevant National Minimum Standards and regulations and safeguarding issues. Reports produced cover all the required matters and are of a high standard. The establishment of a dedicated team has greatly improved the stability, continuity and quality of service provided to children and young people being cared for in private fostering arrangements, their parents and private foster carers. The local authority has produced very good written information for parents and private foster carers. Children and young people are provided with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) booklet about private fostering, contact details for the private fostering social worker and information about advocacy and other services.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The local authority has a comprehensive written statement, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. Staff working for the private fostering service have excellent knowledge and awareness of the local

authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering and safeguarding children and young people. Other relevant professionals and local authority staff are provided with good information and training about private fostering and how to make a referral to the service if they become aware of a child or young person who is, or may be, being privately fostered so that children and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Good communication and close working relationships have been developed at both social worker and managerial levels between the private fostering service and other children's social care services within the local authority so that information received about children and young people who are, or may be, being privately fostered is swiftly acted upon and an initial visit undertaken within the statutory timescale. The service also liaises well with education and health services to support children and young people who are privately fostered to access services they need. There is regular monitoring of the way in which the local authority is discharging its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. There is a strong emphasis within the service on ensuring that vulnerable children and young people are safeguarded and their good health and well-being promoted. Records are comprehensive, well maintained and cover the matters required by the regulations and National Minimum Standards. There are systems in place to capture and monitor data about children and young people who are being privately fostered and private foster carers living in the local authority's area.

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 |
|----------|--------|----------|
|----------|--------|----------|

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

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.