

Nottinghamshire County Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Trisha Gibbs
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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, and the purpose of inspection is to ascertain that the local authority is appropriately fulfilling its functions and duties with regard to 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. The lead officer for private fostering within Nottinghamshire County Council Children and Young People's services is the Safeguarding Children Project Manager. Currently, initial notifications of private fostering arrangements are referred to reception and assessment teams across the county. Social workers undertake initial assessment visits and cases deemed to constitute private fostering arrangements are ultimately allocated to longer term teams for ongoing support. All private fostering assessments are authorised by team managers.

Summary

The local authority has appropriately implemented a range of initiatives to promote an awareness of the notification requirements for private fostering arrangements. Good publicity material has been produced to inform the public and communication activities have been designed to inform local authority staff and partner agencies. Awareness raising functions are monitored to measure impact. There has been an increase in the notification of private fostering arrangements following a task-centred publicity drive in October last year. At the time of this inspection the local authority were supporting 11 such arrangements. Good support is being offered to families where a private fostering arrangement has been assessed as suitable. Children carers and parents are being appropriately consulted. Although information about arrangements is appropriately gathered and assessed, currently there is no single document that brings together the assessment of the child's needs against the suitability assessment of the carer. Children and young people are provided with good support but there is no written information aimed specifically at them to explain their status and the support available to them. Very good systems are in place to monitor how private fostering arrangements are notified and supported. The Nottingham Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) are proactive in promoting a multi-agency approach to carrying out the regulatory duties in relation to private fostering arrangements.

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 of the local authority's private fostering arrangements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The local authority has been pro-active in raising the profile of private fostering through the distribution of publicity material on an annual basis since 2005. Leaflets and posters aimed at raising public awareness have been routinely distributed to all libraries, health centres and schools. Initial training was provided to staff and clear detailed procedures, including flow-charts

and formats, are available on the local authority intranet. In 2007 the numbers of referrals being made for private fostering were fully reviewed. The numbers of notifications and referrals was recognised as being low given the population of the county. Following a report to the NSCB it was agreed that a special private fostering awareness month would be launched. The month commenced with an inter-agency seminar about private fostering, as part of the inter-agency safeguarding programme, and after this a number of positive initiatives were undertaken. These included use of a wider range of publications and websites to provide information, and interviews on local radio stations. The local authority has ensured that private fostering publicity material is available in an appropriate range of languages accessible to the local communities and that it is distributed within these communities. Outcomes from the more recent awareness campaign have been positive and numbers of confirmed private fostering arrangements have increased. The local authority routinely reviews the effectiveness of awareness raising initiatives. An electronic staff survey to ascertain staff's understanding about private fostering and to identify future training needs is one of the initiatives included in a robust action plan for this year. The local authority has a clearly stated procedure for responding to notifications. The procedures refer to, and comply with, the timescales laid out in the National Minimum Standards and Regulations. Referrals are initially assessed by the reception and assessment team who undertake visits, statutory checks and an assessment of the potential arrangement. The needs of children in private fostering arrangements are fully considered and supported. Their health and education needs are properly accounted for and supported within the private fostering arrangement. Potential carers are generally assessed appropriately to ensure that the arrangement is suitable and will match the child's needs, however, much of the information about the carer and the child is not formally brought together as a discreet placement assessment. Good information is gathered and the wishes and feelings of children are represented but the records are dispersed within the electronic recording system and can be difficult to track chronologically. Children are encouraged to maintain contact with parents where this is viable and carers are supporting these arrangements. In some instances carers and parents are working well together and where possible a signed agreement between them is drawn up. Carers, parents and children are receiving a good level and standard of support from allocated social workers. Social workers are working well within some arrangements that are complex. Visits are being undertaken within required timescales. Children and young people are receiving good social work support on an individual basis and their wishes and feelings are being represented. In some instances additional specialist support has been made available. There is however, no age-appropriate written material produced especially for them that explains their status within a private fostering arrangement, and the nature of support available to them.

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 very good written statement in place that clearly sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. The statement includes all of the required information and is linked to practice guidance for staff. There is a named lead officer for private fostering and also a lead service manager for each children's service locality team. The service managers liaise with the named officer to ensure that practice is consistent across the county. The lead officer undertakes a range of quality assurance and monitoring exercises. The audit tool used for monitoring has been strengthened to capture both performance and activity within the service. A very good private fostering action plan has been developed for this year. This includes required outcomes and timescales and indicates a strong commitment to working in partnership with other agencies in the identification and support of private fostering arrangements. Generally, the records of private fostering are good and cover the required areas of reporting, however as previously identified, there is no formal process for exclusively pulling private fostering information together or ensuring that key information is routinely captured. The electronic recording system used by the local authority can make it difficult to easily access records that specifically relate to private fostering arrangements. The lead officer appropriately reports back to the NSCB and council members as well as other senior officers within children's services. The chair of the NSCB is also the strategic director for children's services. Two reports have been presented to the NSCB and these summarise well the work undertaken within private fostering arrangements and provide statistical information. The reports also outline proposals for future events and activity. The NSCB are proactive in promoting a multi-agency approach to private fostering and are very involved in the strategic planning to promote community awareness. Very good links with partner agencies have been created.

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 fostered children with information, in formats appropriate to their age and level of understanding, about their private foster carer and his responsibilities, and the meaning of their privately fostered status, and their right to be safeguarded. (NMS 6.2)
- undertake an assessment of the capacity of the proposed or actual private foster carer to look after the child and the suitability of household members, using the dimensions and domains in the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000) (NMS 3.3)

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.