

Merton Private Fostering Arrangements Services

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

Unique reference number	SC072200
Inspection date	8 September 2008
Inspector	Cheryl Carter / Caroline Wilson
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Fostering Team Worsfold House Church Road MITCHAM Surrey CR4 3FA 020 8545 4285
Telephone number	
Email	
Registered person	London Borough of Merton
Registered manager	Sadi Atim
Responsible individual	
Date of last inspection	

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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 the inspection is to ascertain that the local authority is fulfilling its functions and duties with regards 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. Merton Private Fostering Arrangements Service is based with Merton's Fostering Team. They are required to raise awareness of the necessity to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangement and to encourage positive outcomes for private fostered young people, to help reduce any risks to their welfare and safety.

Summary

This was an announced full inspection which focussed on the progress made by Merton in meeting the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and their ability to keep young people safe. All seven key standards in relation to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) are grouped under Staying Safe and Organisation, therefore all standards were inspected. Merton has a nominated worker, who is supervised by the Fostering Team Manager, who undertakes the assessment and monitoring of privately fostered young people and their carers. This worker's role is also to raise awareness and offer training to other workers within the borough to raise awareness. Senior management are also involved in a number of initiatives to raise public and professional awareness of their duty to notify Merton where these arrangements exist. Merton provide a good service to young people who are privately fostered and their carers. Initial assessments are conducted within timescales, and although there are some inconsistencies in relation to the frequency of monitoring visits and contact with birth parents, overall, they are happy with the service offered.

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.

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.

Merton has taken a number of steps to raise the awareness of private fostering within the borough. This includes quarterly, multidisciplinary meetings to ensure that professionals are aware of their duty to alert Merton of any incidences that come to their attention. Information is available for members of the public on the borough's website and a number of articles on this subject have been highlighted in the local press. Merton are acutely aware that schools and health visitors are most likely to come into contact with families where private fostering arrangements exist and are working in partnership with these agencies to ensure that any instances are reported to them. Briefings have also been held with multi-faith leaders so that all members of the community are aware of their responsibility to raise awareness and inform

Merton if private fostering arrangements come to their attention. Leaflets are available that are written in English with a helpline for language translation. However, The initial strap-line is written in English, so people who speak different languages are not immediately aware of the content of the leaflets, which in turn may not prompt them to apply for a leaflet in their preferred choice of language. The welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted by Merton's fostering policies and procedures, which has been updated in line with new legislation. Care is taken to ensure that young people are seen alone by the private fostering worker, unless the worker deems this inappropriate, so that they have the opportunity to report any concerns or compliments in private. The private fostering worker has a clear understanding of their role and Merton's responsibilities relating to private fostering. As well as supporting families, their time is used to promote greater understanding within the borough, including the training of other professionals. The assessment and referrals team have a good awareness of which referrals relate to private fostering and pass these over to the designated private fostering worker. This worker undertakes initial assessments within prescribed timescales and offers ongoing support for private fostering families to ensure that the needs of the young person are met. This includes information about health and where to go for financial assistance as well as to check the suitability of the premises. Current arrangements for obtaining important documentation, such as consent to medical treatment and birth certificates, may lead to young people not receiving appropriate health and financial support if birth families are not co-operative in providing this information. Although for the majority of cases, monitoring visits are undertaken in line with set guidelines to private fostered families, there is evidence of inconsistency in some case files. There is also no evidence of regular contact between Merton and birth families to confirm that they are satisfied with the arrangements made for the young person, although conversations to confirm that they give their consent are held. Information is available about the intended duration if the private fostering arrangement which is agreed and understood by the parent and private foster carer. The young person's wishes and feelings about the fostering arrangement are also sought and taken into account. There is also a young person's guide available that sets out the meaning of their private fostered status and of their right to be safeguarded. Private foster carers are aware of the complaints procedure in case they are unhappy with the service that they are receiving. Young people and private foster carers are provided with the contact details of the private fostering worker whom they can contact at any time should they have any concerns about their care or if they wish to request a visit. Each young person and private foster carers have their own individual case file that ensures information is stored appropriately and confidentially.

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.

Merton has a written Statement of Purpose which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they are to be carried out. This includes the legal

definition of a privately fostered young person and its duties and functions as set out in accordance with relevant legislation. Merton implements an effective system for monitoring the numbers of privately fostered young people and private foster carers within the local area. A written report is provided each year which evaluates the outcome of its work in relation to privately fostered young people within its area, for the consideration of the Director of Children's Services. Merton reports to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board on a quarterly basis, on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered young people in the area are satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it 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
5	ensure that an officer of the authority visits every parents of or a person with parental responsibility for the child. (Regulation 7 (1) (d))	31 December 2008
6	ensure that in the first year of the private fostering arrangements, an officer must meet every child at intervals of no more than six weeks. (Regulation 8 (1) (a))	31 December 2008

Recommendations

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

- provide leaflets in a variety of languages in order to promote awareness for all members of the communiy.(NMS 2)

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.