

# Medway Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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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 is managed within the Adoption team of Medway council. The designated person is the Service Manager of Specialist Services. A dedicated private fostering social worker has been appointed, taking responsibility for private fostering notifications, advice and support and communication strategies. The majority of the notifications and fostering arrangements for the Medway Towns are for young people estranged from their parents.

### **Summary**

This is the first inspection against the National Minimum Standards of Private Fostering arrangements for Medway Council. This inspection took place within the second year of the three year period. All key National Minimum Standards were assessed, and three groups of carers and children involved in private fostering were spoken to along with key staff members. There are no standards under the outcome groups for Being Healthy, Enjoying and Achieving, Making a Positive Contribution or Achieving Economic Wellbeing, so these have not been inspected. The dedicated workers have developed good systems to meet the standards and keep young people safe. A wide range of methods have been used to raise the awareness of private fostering with the general public and with professionals. The numbers of notified arrangements are low in certain areas and plans have been drawn up to ensure the need to inform the service is advertised in an ongoing programme. Assessment procedures are thorough and there is a clear decision making process regarding the suitability of arrangements. Outcomes for young people are good in the key areas and there is evidence that young people's health and education needs have been promoted. The privately fostered young people in Medway receive a good service.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

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.

Action has been taken to raise awareness about private fostering within the community, through the use of leaflets, posters and in a monthly publication from the council to all households, also through the induction process for all new staff and with training for other professionals in social care. The dedicated social worker has given presentations to education and health professionals. However, these efforts have not resulted in many notifications of private fostering being made. Medway has identified the need to review the effectiveness of its awareness raising campaign, particularly with the pre-schoolers and faith and community groups. The leaflets and posters are all in English, these are not displayed prominently or available in an appropriate range of languages and formats. Clear, user friendly forms have been devised to aid notification. These ask all the relevant questions about the arrangements. Clear guidance is set out in the policy and procedure documents. The assessments completed by the dedicated worker are

comprehensive and robust and address all the relevant requirements. There are systems in place to make sure privately fostered children are safe, such as to check that all adults in the household are suitable to privately foster; a service manager oversees all notifications and written reports and then reports annually to the local safeguarding board on outcomes for privately fostered children. Arrangements have been made for privately fostered children to be allocated their own private fostering social worker. She visits regularly and also sees them separately, to safeguard their welfare and ascertain their views on the arrangements. The private fostering social worker works closely with children's social workers in the 16 plus team to achieve the best outcomes for privately fostered children and to ensure a smooth transition. Young people have access to a Complaints Officer, however, feedback received suggested most of the young people are unaware of the complaints system. There have been no disqualifications but alternative arrangements have been made where the private fostering arrangement was not considered to be in the young person's best interests. There is a clear appeals process, but this has not yet been used. The financial arrangements are looked at individually and appropriate support and advice given where needed. The assessment establishes whether the young person in question should be classified as a child in need and what responsibilities this places on the authority. Contact with the parents of privately fostered children are made as soon as the arrangement is notified. They contribute to the assessment of whether the arrangement is in the best interests of their child. Information, including other available options, is provided to the parents and in some cases has led to the young person returning to live with their parents. Parents are supported to understand their continuing responsibility for the young person. The council is in the process of writing new leaflets for each group with advice on complaints, and independent advice. Also included for the private foster carers and parents would be advice on welfare and safe care, rights and contact agreements. Medway plans to support private foster carers through training and professional development as individually required, accessing core training from the council. All of the private foster carers stated they received good advice and support from the dedicated social worker.

### **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 service has a clear Statement of Purpose which sets out its duties and functions. It clearly states the responsible persons to contact and who is signing off all decisions made. The council has a clear communication strategy which promotes awareness of the notification requirements into the wider community. There is a clear set of policies and procedures relating to private fostering. These are set out in an easy to read style. These set out Medway's duties and functions in relation to private fostering and contain most, but not all, recommended information. A explanation pack has been given to all members of the social work staff. The responsibilities of the various roles such as the dedicated social worker are described. There is good communication between all the teams but some social workers are still slow to respond regarding

their duties and responsibilities. Private fostering arrangements form part of the induction training for new social workers to ensure they are aware of the regulations. Arrangements have been made for the Service Manager of Specialist Services to be the named person with responsibility for the management of private fostering. The service benefits from an experienced, designated social worker who offers support and advice to carers and parents of privately fostered children. This staff member is involved in extending their knowledge and understanding by attending conferences and special interest groups. Systems are in place to ensure any notifications, assessments or reviews of private fostering would be brought to the responsible service manager, and also senior management sign-off decisions about the overall suitability of any placements. The decision making process is easily tracked and a statement and signature is recorded on each file about the decision of suitability of the arrangements. Monitoring of the way the responsibilities are discharged is also undertaken by this senior manager. There is an annual report made available to senior managers evaluating the service and noting the work undertaken in this area. Development plans and the need for further resources are looked at in this report. Good records are kept of all notifications and enquiries, the action taken and decisions made. The records are kept safe and secure and young people, parents and private carers are made aware of their right to see the records. Appropriate procedures are in place to refer any issues of concern about young people's safety to the correct team for investigation. This is done as soon as the concern is raised regardless of where the worker is in the assessment process. One case evidenced that concerns about a young person's safety had led to different arrangements being made. The chair of the safeguarding board is provided with information on an annual basis to ensure the safety of privately fostered young people in the area has been assessed.

## 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):

- review the effectiveness of the awareness campaign in ensuring that all sections of the community and professionals are aware of the need to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangements (NMS 2)
- ensure the leaflets advertising the service are available in a format which is understood by all languages. (NMS 2.7)
- ensure clear complaints policy and procedures are available to the young people with contact details of all relevant persons (NMS 6.3)
- ensure all policies and procedures are in place. (NMS 2.3.3)

## 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.**