

Manchester Children's Services

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

Unique reference number	SC075099
Inspection date	9 December 2008
Inspector	Jeffrey Banham
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Quality Assurance and Performance Management Unit 10 Lower Vickers St. Miles Platting Manchester M40 7EL
Telephone number	0161 203 3232
Email	adecrop@manchester.gov.uk
Registered person	Manchester Children, Families and Social Care
Registered manager	Anthony Decrop
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

The Children's Services department of Manchester City Council is responsible for implementing the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The department works with other relevant agencies to promote the awareness of private fostering in the community and to ensure that notifications of private fostering arrangements are made. The department undertakes assessments to determine the suitability of arrangements and monitors identified arrangements to ensure the welfare of children and young people is promoted and safeguarded.

Summary

The Children's Services Department has reviewed its policies, practices and procedures in relation to its responsibilities to managing private fostering arrangements. A specialist worker has been employed to improve awareness of private fostering within relevant agencies and the wider community. Social workers are offered greater support and advice from a named manager and their practice is now subject to more robust scrutiny.

These arrangements have not yet, however, had time to fully impact on existing practice. There is confusion over what constitutes a private fostering arrangement. Practices in relation to approval and support of carers have not been sufficiently robust. Inconsistent implementation of policies and inadequate care planning have resulted in the safeguarding and welfare of children not always being adequately promoted.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the 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 inadequate.

The Children's Services Department has undertaken a range of activities to raise the awareness of the definition of private fostering arrangements amongst relevant professional agencies and the wider community. Although the numbers of notifications has risen it is recognised that more needs to be done to raise awareness further and a strategy for achieving this objective has been set out. It is also recognised that more needs to be done to ensure that staff within the Children's Service Department are aware of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement and where other arrangements, such as identifying the child as a 'child in need' would be more appropriate.

A considerable number of staff across the department are involved with assessments, agreeing the suitability of arrangements and supporting children and foster carers. This leads to inconsistencies of practice, of supervision of arrangements and of the organisation of children and carers' files.

The safety and welfare of children is not always promoted as some placements of what are clearly 'children in need' are defined as private fostering arrangements. Foster carers and children do not always receive the care planning and support that the needs of children in placement require. Some foster carers are not assessed in accordance with the department's own procedures. There is sometimes confusion and delay over obtaining checks from the Criminal Records Bureau and of obtaining references and checks with other agencies.

Staff are unclear about the policy of the department in supporting children and foster carers. In some cases, financial support is given to private foster carers. In others, it is formally recorded that it is not the policy of the department to give financial support to foster carers. In some cases, private foster carers receive little support. In others, social workers assist with money for school transport, for carers to organise contacts with a child's family members and in working with schools over issues of challenging behaviour.

Agreements between parents or those with parental responsibility are not always clear and this leads to confusion amongst carers about what is expected of them. The duration of placements, financial support from parents and consent to medical treatment are not always clearly established. In some cases, children have no-one with effective parental responsibility involved in their care. The inconsistency of understanding amongst staff and varying application of procedures compromises the welfare and safety of children in placements.

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 satisfactory.

The local authority has produced a written statement setting out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. Although it does not contain all the details referred to in the National Minimum Standard, such as how it will provide support and training to private foster carers, it provides an overview of how the local authority will fulfil its responsibilities in relation to private fostering arrangements.

The authority has employed a worker with specific responsibility for promoting awareness of private fostering within the authority. A private fostering project work plan sets out a framework of action and tasks to be completed for the period 2008-2009 in order to promote a greater understanding of private fostering. The work plan recognises the continuing need to promote understanding of private fostering within relevant agencies and the wider community and creates a programme of activities designed to achieve that objective. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. A multi agency steering group is responsible for ensuring key agencies are involved and work together to promote awareness within those agencies. One significant issue is identified as being the ability of relevant staff to correctly identify what constitutes a private fostering arrangement and ensure that it is notified to the department.

The recent response of the local authority to the implementation of its responsibilities to private fostering arrangements, for example, the appointment of a development worker and a named officer for social workers to contact, now ensures that good practice is promoted and developed. Although these resources have not yet had time to impact on all areas of practice awareness of the significance of private fostering is increasing and the main areas for further development are being addressed. Files have been audited and plans for practical improvements have been drawn up. Annual reports are produced and presented to the Director of Children's Services and to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.

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):

- review the contents of the written statement to ensure it contains all the information identified in the standard (NMS 1)
- ensure that the local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with the regulations (NMS 3)
- ensure that the local authority provide such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers as appears to be necessary (NMS 4)
- ensure that children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. (NMS 6)