

Leeds City Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Jacqueline Malcolm
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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

Leeds City Council is responsible for identifying, responding to notifications and monitoring private fostering arrangements. Two qualified, experienced and motivated social workers have been developing the service since 2007 and this work is lead by a team manager and supported by three senior managers. The service has seven private fostering arrangements in place.

Summary

This was the first announced inspection in which Leeds City Council identify, respond to notifications and monitor private fostering arrangements in the area. All of the National Minimum Standards (NMS) were assessed. The arrangements for privately fostered children in Leeds have been in place since 2007, two years after the NMS and Regulations came into force. The Local Authority has done a lot of work to raise awareness about private fostering both with partner agencies and the wider diverse communities of Leeds. This is ongoing to ensure the profile of private fostering is sustained. The service has policies and procedures to support private fostering arrangements that make clear the duties and responsibilities of relevant staff. However, not all staff have responded positively, policy and procedures have are not always followed. For example, not all carers have had Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance, not all assessments to determine a carer's suitability have been completed and subsequent visits to carer's households have not been done. These practices do not sufficiently safeguard children. The Local Authority has not implemented a safe and effective system for monitoring the way it discharges its duties and functions.

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 Local Authorities 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 Local Authority has implemented a number of strategies to promote and increase awareness of private fostering arrangements. This is good. For example, there is information for carers, parents and professionals, which can be accessed in different languages to makes clear what private fostering is all about. Contact has also been made with a number of services. For example, Health, Education, Safeguarding Board, Youth Offending Service. Faith, voluntary and community groups from the diverse communities of Leeds have also been approached. Good progress has been made by the Local Authority to develop and raise awareness. Although good progress has been made the information to raise awareness for children who are privately fostered needs to be addressed. There is some confusion and resistance from some social workers in acknowledging the importance of private fostering. Some social workers lack sufficient awareness of the policies and procedures governing private fostering arrangements and do not follow them through in practice although the local authority has developed good policies and procedures. The welfare and safety of children is compromised when there are shortfalls in

awareness and practice in relation to private fostering arrangements. When the Local Authority has been notified or have been made aware about an existing arrangement, not all carers have been assessed to determine their suitability to care for children. Not all CRB checks are completed and subsequent visits to households have not been done. There are delays in the outcome of suitability of some carer's assessments and not all suitability checks are signed off. This means that children are living with carers whose suitability to care for them is not always known. These practices do not appropriately safeguard and protect children. It is not clear how carers and parents of children who are privately fostered are informed and supported to meet the needs of privately fostered children. This is particularly relevant in households that have not been visited by social workers. Some children have been enabled to participate in decisions about their lives. However, children do not have appropriate access to information and support when they need it. This does not ensure that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

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 inadequate.

The Local Authority has developed policies, procedures and guidance about private fostering arrangements. However, not all staff have implemented the policies and procedures in practice. The 'Statement on Private Fostering' does not fully and accurately describe the function of the service. For example, although details of senior managers are included in this document, there are no names of the social workers leading on private fostering arrangements who can be contacted by social work practitioners and other professionals for advice. The statement does not make explicit how relevant staff will be trained to ensure they have appropriate understanding and expertise in relation to private fostering, including induction and other training programmes. There is no mention of the information and support available to children. It does not include information about the available training to prospective and private foster carers. The Local Authority has not implemented a safe and effective system for monitoring the way it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. As a result, shortfalls in practice are not properly addressed and management accountability when issues need to be addressed is not clear. This does not sufficiently safeguard children. An annual report is prepared and submitted to a number of senior managers, including the Local Safeguarding Board Manager. The purpose of this report demonstrates how the Local Authority satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in the area is safeguarded and promoted. The information contained in the report does not accurately reflect the practice.

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):

- ensure that the documentation to decide on the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements is signed and dated (NMS 3.4)
- ensure that the suitability of all carers and children are assessed in accordance with the Regulations (NMS 3.1)
- ensure that carers and children are subsequently visited in accordance with the Regulations (NMS 2.3)
- ensure that advice and support is provided to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers (4.1)
- ensure that advice and support is provided to the parents of children who are privately fostered (5.1)
- ensure that children are able to access information and support so their welfare is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 6.1)
- ensure that CRB checks are carried out on all individuals assessed as private foster carers (7.2)
- ensure that all relevant staff have an appropriate understanding of the Local Authorities duties and functions in relation to private fostering arrangements and of their responsibilities (NMS 1)
- ensure that the Statement of Private Fostering clearly sets out the duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the manner in which they will be carried out (NMS 1)
- ensure that the system to monitor the Local Authorities duties and functions in relation to private fostering is robust and improves practice when shortfalls are identified (NMS 7.1)

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.