

Kingston Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Sophie Jane Barton
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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

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of the local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16, or under 18 if the child is disabled, by someone other than a parent or a close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Local authorities are required to raise awareness of the necessity to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangement, to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people and reduce any risk to their welfare and safety.

In the Royal Borough of Kingston the Strategic Manager for Looked After Services has the management responsibility for the private fostering arrangements. The initial assessments of children and young people are carried out by the childcare assessment teams, while a social worker in the adoption and fostering team completes the suitability assessment of the proposed carer. The Strategic Manager signs off the suitability of the arrangements. The child's social worker is the designated officer of the authority to visit and support the child, carers and parents. At the time of the inspection there were eight notified private fostering arrangements in place.

Summary

At this announced full inspection all key standards were assessed. The National Minimum Standards and Regulations are assessed under the two outcomes relating to Staying Safe and Organisation. This is the first inspection of Royal Borough of Kingston's private fostering arrangements.

Overall the authority has suitable procedures and systems to ensure the welfare of privately fostered children is promoted. There are some good pockets of practice, backed up by robust procedures, but there has also been some practice that has not appropriately met the regulations and standards. There is an effective awareness campaign targeting professionals and communities of the importance to notify the authority of arrangements. Children and young people are visited promptly following the notification of the arrangement, and the children's wishes and feelings are always ascertained. However, the quality of the service is reduced by there not being a consistent approach to carrying out regular subsequent visits. Proposed private foster carers are satisfactorily assessed for their capacity and suitability to care for the child, although the timescales for completion are lengthy which fails to provide robust safeguards at all times.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the Royal Borough of Kingston Private Fostering Arrangements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The local authority has worked hard to ensure that they receive notifications about all privately fostered children living in its area. The authority has developed a full awareness raising campaign, which has been effective and successful in raising notifications particularly from schools. The authority has provided written information to various community agencies and groups as well as training through presentations and workshops. The publicity materials adequately detail the processes for notification. Links have now been made with ethnic minority groups and faith groups within the local area to further promote the need to notify all arrangements.

Children in private fostering arrangements are adequately safeguarded. Notifications are dealt with promptly, with the child being visited and always seen alone within seven working days of the notification. Children and young people benefit from social workers that undertake comprehensive initial assessments which conclude whether the child is immediately safe. Social workers routinely make contact with parents and seek legal and immigration advice in relation to children moving to the United Kingdom from another country. However children and carers have not always received an appropriate service following the initial assessment. The Adoption and Fostering Team is responsible for completing the fuller suitability assessment of the private foster carers, which should follow on from the initial assessment. Referrals to and allocations within this team have been significantly delayed. Furthermore the suitability assessments have not been undertaken in a timely fashion, ranging from between four and 18 months, instead of six weeks. This can have a significant impact on the welfare of the child, particularly as Criminal Records Bureau checks are not obtained promptly or sought for all adult members of the household. Over the past six months these shortfalls have been addressed, and systems for referring and allocating are much improved.

The authority has provided workers with appropriate policies, guidance, systems and forms to ensure regulations are met in assessment and visiting. Assessments of the suitability and capacity of private foster carers vary in quality. All have appropriately covered a range of areas, which includes financial implications, capacity to nurture the child, arrangements for contact with parents, safety within the home, approaches to parenting, discipline and lifestyle. However not all assessments show evidence of suitable checks with schools, referee visits, or a General Practitioner reference, which limits the quality of assessments and the overall safeguarding.

All privately fostered children currently known to the authority have been visited recently, and all have an allocated social worker. However the children and young people are not always visited often enough to ensure a consistent and thorough approach to safeguarding and promoting welfare. There has been some excellent social work intervention with some privately fostered children, including at least six weekly visits and core assessments being completed. However there has also been children not visited or seen by a social worker for several months. Practice has however considerably improved in the last three months. In all cases there is a priority given to the children's wishes and feelings being ascertained, and that the child's needs arising from their racial origin are met.

Children, young people and carers receive a good level of advice and guidance from the local authority. Particularly, children and young people have access to a participation officer within the authority, and they are provided with written and verbal information about their rights. Good consideration is given to how best to liaise with carers who do not speak English.

Interpreters are routinely used and written information is appropriately translated. Private foster carers benefit from the authority being committed to providing them with suitable training opportunities in order to support them to meet the needs of the child. Recognition and help is also given to the financial difficulties some carers may experience, and the authority is good at supporting the long term permanency for children through providing assistance with Special Guardianship and Residence Orders. Parents are also supported well by social workers, receiving necessary information and guidance on their rights and of the responsibility of the local authority. Parents are fully encouraged to maintain responsibility and close contact with their child.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Staff are appropriately aware of the local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering. Staff and other professionals are suitably guided by a clear and detailed written statement on private fostering. This document sets out the procedures and responsibilities of safeguarding children in private fostering arrangements. There has been a recent drive in the authority to ensure all staff are appropriately trained and knowledgeable about private fostering.

Overall the management of private fostering arrangements is satisfactory, with some areas of good practice. Well organised records are kept for each privately fostered child and each private foster carer. Case records vary in quality. There are some that provide inadequate records of visits to the children, although most written records of visits are good and report on whether the placement is satisfactory, particularly commenting on the child's welfare, wishes and feelings. There is an effective tracking system for all enquiries and notifications, which is monitored at least monthly by senior management. However, shortfalls in practice over the past year have not been highlighted or addressed promptly by the authority, through a lack of auditing. There is however a clear priority to improve the service, and a considerable commitment is given to ensuring children are happy and well cared for in private fostering arrangements. The procedures, policies and forms all aim to exceed national minimum standards. The Director of Children's

Services is provided with a written report each year which evaluates the outcomes of the work with privately fostered children in their area. The process for notifying the Local Safeguarding Children's Board of how the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded has just been strengthened, to ensure all board members now have the opportunity to view a detailed report.

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
3	ensure that an officer of the authority visits every child at intervals of not more than six weeks in the first year of the arrangement, and at intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any second or subsequent year. When carrying out a visit the officer must establish such matters listed in Schedule 3 as appear relevant (Regulation 8. NMS 3)	6 April 2009
3	ensure that once a notification is received the officer must establish such matters listed in Schedule 3. In particular ensure that Criminal Record's Bureau checks are obtained on all adult members of the household (Regulation 7. NMS 3)	6 April 2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the child is visited at intervals of not more than six weeks in the first year of the arrangement, and at intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any second or subsequent year. When carrying out a visit the officer must establish such matters listed in Schedule 3 as appear relevant (Regulation 8, NMS 3)
- establish such matters listed in Schedule 3 following receipt of a notification. In particular ensure that Criminal Records Bureau checks are obtained on all adult members of the household (Regulation 7, NMS 3)
- ensure that the assessment of the suitability of the private foster carer is completed within 42 days, and in particular includes a medical reference, report of visits to personal referees and a check with schools where appropriate (NMS 3)
- ensure that reviews of the suitability of private foster carers, other members of the household and of the accommodation are undertaken at appropriate intervals, including renewing Criminal Records Bureau checks at 3 yearly intervals (NMS 3).