

# Hampshire County Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Lynda Mosling
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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**

Hampshire County Council have a named senior officer, based in The Castle, Winchester, who monitors all private fostering activity. The operational private fostering work is carried out in the district teams by children's social workers. At the time of inspection there were 15 notified private fostering arrangements in place. This number is small for a large local authority so the service continues to try to raise awareness across the county. All young people in notified private fostering arrangements have an allocated worker and the arrangements have been assessed as meeting their individual needs.

### **Summary**

This is the first inspection of the private fostering arrangements of Hampshire County Council to assess the key National Minimum Standards. There are good systems in place to meet the standards and keep young people safe. These include clear procedures, thorough assessment of suitability of arrangements, annual reviews and regular monitoring of files and practice. A wide range of methods have been used to raise awareness with the general public and with professionals. The numbers of notified arrangements are low so plans have been made to continue the awareness raising campaign. There are clear decision making processes, following assessment, that ensure the welfare of the young people is properly considered. Support to carers, parents and young people is good.

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 of the private fostering arrangements for this service.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is not judged.

There are no key standards in this outcome area.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

The service has a named officer in the children's services department who monitors all private fostering activity and ensures the procedures are being carried out according to the Regulations and the National Minimum Standards. The operational work for private fostering is carried out in the districts by social workers in the children's teams under the supervision of team managers. The named officer has set up good systems to ensure those undertaking the work are aware of their responsibility for the welfare of the young people in private fostering arrangements. An awareness raising campaign began in 2005 and included: press releases; articles in local magazines; leaflets sent to health centres; libraries; education establishments; housing associations and early years services. Presentations were made at team meetings and training events to raise staff awareness. Information was also provided to other social care, health and education colleagues who are likely to have information about the care of children and young people. In common with the experience in other local authorities, the number of notifications as a result of this campaign is disappointing with only one new notification from the general

public received during 2005 and 2007. Raising awareness with colleagues is more successful and has led to a small but steady increase in notifications of arrangements. The number of notified arrangements in place on 31 March 2007 was 18. The service is aware that continued attempts to raise awareness are required in order to reach the arrangements not yet notified. There is a plan in place to do this. Staff in the children's services have been involved in awareness raising sessions but knowledge about the arrangements is still inconsistent and some family placement workers undertaking duty are unsure about the procedures. The named person has set up a specialist interest group for workers who have been involved in private fostering to share good practice and find solutions to common problems. There are clear private fostering procedures, supported by forms and letters, that include the procedure following notification. The reception and assessment team deal with any new referrals and an initial assessment is undertaken to ensure the arrangements safeguard the young person's welfare. Following the initial assessment all young people are allocated a social worker and a core assessment is undertaken. This includes the private carers' capacity to meet the child's needs. The procedures make it clear that the welfare of the child is paramount and that steps to ensure the young person's safety must be taken if an arrangement is not in the young person's best interests. The private fostering assessment uses the headings of a core assessment to determine whether the arrangement is in the best interest of the young people and whether the private foster carers are suitable. The completed assessments are thorough and provide good evidence for the decision taken. The social workers take the safety of the young person very seriously and ensure the arrangement is the most appropriate option available. The views of the young people, the parents and proposed carers are all considered as part of the assessment. The assessment covers health, education, cultural and social needs of the young people and detail how these needs will be met by the arrangement. There is a good checklist for parents that prompts them to consider whether the arrangements meet their child's needs to their satisfaction. This ensures the parents are reminded about their responsibilities in agreeing the placement. Suitability of the carers is checked out using a thorough assessment procedure including checks with the probation service, health visitor, NSPCC, education and criminal record bureau. Checks are undertaken on all members of the household over 16 years of age. Following the assessment a report is made to the district service manager with a copy of the assessment and other supporting forms. The service manager then considers the suitability of the arrangement and makes a decision which is signed and returned to the social worker. The parents and carers are invited to meet with the service manager at the decision making stage, although few choose to do so. There is currently no formal letter sent to the parents and carers notifying them of the decision. An agreement form signed by the parents and carers is obtained and kept on file with a care plan for the child. Notification of the agreement is sent to health and education to inform them of the arrangement. All of the systems are clear and there is a good decision making trail. The financial arrangements are looked into and appropriate advice given. Every privately fostered young person is classified as a child in need and the assessment identifies what action should be taken as a result of this. Support is provided for the carers and the parents, including help to gain agreement on issues such as money and contact. Information for parents and carers can be provided in different languages and discussions with young people and parents can be supported by interpreters. Foster carers spoken to were very positive about the social work support they have received and one commented, 'We have had lots of lovely social workers over the years'. There is evidence of social workers helping with issues of identity, cultural awareness and continuing contact with family. Case notes and discussion with carers show that regular visits to young people, and reviews of the arrangements, are taking place in most cases. Young people are provided with contact numbers for social workers and advocates

but do not routinely have access to the range of information available to other fostered young people. Social workers are committed to supporting private fostering arrangements but the competing pressures on their time mean other cases often take priority.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is not judged.

There are no key standards in this outcome area.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is not judged.

There are no key standards in this outcome area.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

There are no key standards in this outcome area.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

There is a thorough statement regarding private fostering that clearly sets out the legislation, the responsibilities and the procedure for work relating to private fostering. The procedure manual has easy to read charts that detail roles and responsibilities and the actions needed to meet the standards. This ensures that there is no confusion about the process. The procedure manual includes copies of all the supporting letters and forms to provide further clarity. The service also has produced an improvement plan setting out the targets for the coming year. This takes into account the need to continue to work on public awareness about the need to notify arrangements. The service is very good at identifying the likely consequences of their work and have highlighted the effect that increased notifications might have on the service. Using estimates based on country wide figures the potential number of private fostering arrangements is projected as much higher than currently seen. The service would struggle with this increase if it materialised. However, the service is committed to raising awareness in order to ensure the welfare of young people in their area. There are good monitoring systems in place. Although the service managers in each district have responsibility to make decisions the senior manager with responsibility for private fostering monitors the work. This includes a practice and file audit. Issues arising from the audits are reported to the director and Hampshire Safeguarding Board as part of the annual reporting process. Details about numbers of arrangements notified, the meeting of annual targets and the way practice conforms to the procedures are reported at least annually. Good practice is commended, such as the chronologies on each young person's file to track their welfare. Learning points and gaps in practice are noted and action plans put in place to address these. Files contain clear information showing how the arrangements meet the needs of the young people. The service undertakes annual reviews of the arrangements to ensure this continues. The reviewing system is a good example of the service taking its responsibilities for this area of work seriously. There is good statistical information about numbers of arrangements, the profile of young people involved and the reasons for the arrangements. This combined with the other monitoring systems informs the annual improvement plan developed by the service.

## 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 information is available to all staff clarifying the definition of private fostering and the notification requirements (NMS 2.2.1)
- ensure the parents and carers of the young person are informed of the decision made regarding suitability of the arrangements. (NMS 3.4)
- provide privately fostered young people with information about the advice and assistance available locally to young people regarding healthy lifestyles ( NMS 6)

## 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.**