

London Borough of Ealing Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Paula Eaton
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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

The London borough of Ealing's Private Fostering arrangements are managed within the Children in Need service. There are currently three Children in Need teams in the borough. The team that supports unaccompanied minors also takes some responsibility for Private Fostering arrangements depending on the need of the individual child. Each team has management support, social work and support staff and office space equipped with computer equipment, storage and meeting rooms. At the time of this inspection there were eight private fostering arrangements being monitored and two further cases in the process of being assessed.

Summary

The service has clear policies and procedures in place for dealing with notifications and assessing and monitoring Private Fostering arrangements. Ongoing work is taking place to find other, more effective ways to promote awareness and increase the level of notifications. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and carers and the children placed with them feel supported especially with regards to being offered practical support and guidance. There are clear recording and monitoring systems in place and comprehensive records are maintained for each placement. At present there is no written information available for children regarding Private Fostering. Although systems are in place to ensure that initial visits and monitoring visits take place within the timescales required there are some lapses. There have also been some delays in obtaining the required Criminal Record Bureau checks for adult members of Private Fostering households.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This was the first inspection carried out for this service.

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.

The local authority has good systems in place to increase awareness of Private Fostering within local communities and within groups of professionals who come into contact with children, young people and families. A working group has been set up that meets on a regular basis to discuss ideas for increasing awareness and to monitor the effectiveness of initiatives that are implemented. This group has a very proactive approach and is well organised and ensures efficient use of the available resources. Colourful, informative posters and leaflets with clear messages have been produced and are distributed widely throughout the borough and articles have been published in local community magazines, professional bulletins and newsletters. The borough's intranet also includes clear information for staff on Private Fostering and their roles and responsibilities. The service also provides training briefings on Private Fostering as part of its ongoing training programme. These training sessions are open to multi-agency groups including local faith groups and other professionals. The service has clear systems in place for dealing with notifications. The procedure includes carrying out the initial visit to the placement

within the required seven days, however, this timescale is not always being met. An initial assessment is taking place promptly and being followed up with a comprehensive assessment of the placement and the child's needs. There are also clear guidelines in place for the action staff should take if a placement is deemed unsuitable and staff are able to clearly demonstrate their understanding of this procedure. Assessments include information regarding how the cultural and religious needs of children are being met and how their health needs are being met. Foster carers and the children being cared for feel that their social workers are helpful and provide practical advice and guidance with regard to making arrangements to meet the child's needs. Some financial support is also given where appropriate. For example, financial support has been provided to ensure that children have adequate school uniform and children have been supported to take part in leisure activities such as swimming lessons. Regular reviews of each child's placement and needs take place. The service strives to ensure that Criminal Records Bureau checks are completed for all adults in the Private Fostering household. However, even though staff consistently remind the carers about the need for these checks to be completed and provide practical support to help them complete the forms some foster carers are reluctant to do this and therefore there is sometimes a delay in these checks being completed. Recording for Private Fostering has now been included on the local authorities main social services recording system and staff are receiving training on how to effectively use this computer system. This system will allow for closer monitoring of individual cases by staff and the management team. Regular visits take place to Private Fostering homes and advice and support is given although these visits are not always taking place at the required intervals. Written information regarding Private Fostering is available for the carers and they are given contact details for agencies that may be able to provide additional support as well as the contact details for their allocated worker. Interpreters are provided where English is not the first language of the child and/or the carer. A recent decision has been made to include Private Foster Carers in the training programme for Kinship carers. The service strives to initiate and maintain contact with the parents of Privately Fostered children. However, currently all of the Private Fostering arrangements that are being monitored involve unaccompanied minors and their parents are abroad. Also, Private Foster Carers are sometimes reluctant to give this information to social services. Some staff have been able to obtain details for parents and will make contact to confirm the arrangements in place, offer support and advice and help facilitate contact between them and their child or children. Children in placement feel supported by their social worker and feel able to approach them if they have any concerns or need help. Children are encouraged to attend and contribute to their review meetings and social workers speak to children alone when visiting to enable them to express their feelings openly without the carer present. At present there is no written information in a suitable format available for children regarding Private Fostering. Children are encouraged and supported to maintain contact with members of their family.

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 in place for Private Fostering that outlines the local authorities roles and responsibilities with regard to Private Fostering and how these duties will be carried out. There is a named operations manager with overall responsibility for Private Fostering who is effective at monitoring the work that is taking place. The service has also recently introduced 'Private Fostering Champions' who are senior social work staff with specific expertise and knowledge in Private Fostering who other workers can approach for advice and guidance. Clear procedures and processes are in place for the effective assessment and monitoring of Private Fostering placements and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities within this. There is also an ongoing programme of training on Private Fostering for staff that is also available to external agencies. The service has improved monitoring systems with the introduction of a new recording system for Private Fostering arrangements. This will allow management easier, more immediate access to records to ensure that the local authority's duties and functions are being discharged effectively. Good, comprehensive records are maintained relating to each individual child in a Private Fostering arrangement. The service prepares a detailed annual report for the Local Safeguarding Children's 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
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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):

- provide written information on Private Fostering for children (NMS 6)
- ensure that Criminal Record Bureau checks are completed for all adult members of the private fostering household (NMS 3)
- carry out initial and subsequent visits to Private Fostering households within the required timescales (NMS 2)

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.