

Dudley Local Authority Private Fostering Arrangements Agency
Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

Unique reference number	SC079386
Inspection date	8 January 2008
Inspector	Janet Manders / Vivien Slyfield
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Dudley Metropolitan Council 7th Floor Falcon House Dudley DY2 8PG
Telephone number	01384 815 858
Email	
Registered person	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Registered manager	Jane Prashar
Responsible individual	Jane Prashar
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

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or 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 and to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people, and reduce any risks to their welfare and safety. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has recently identified a senior practitioner to act as the nominated person for private fostering. The suitability of placements and carers are to be assessed by workers within the area social work team. Decisions regarding the suitability of private fostering arrangements are considered by the team manager. The fostering panel is notified of all private fostering arrangements. The inspector was informed of eight private fostering arrangements that the authority has been notified of in its area over the past year. The authority is aware of a further four arrangements, that had commenced prior to 2007. At the time of the inspection there were three private fostering arrangements in place. Young people who are privately fostered in the Dudley MBC area, fall into two major groups, those young people who are estranged from their family and those young people from abroad attending a local language school.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection, which concentrated on the progress made by the authority in meeting the National Minimum Standards for private fostering. It concentrated on the service's ability to keep young people safe and the organisation and management of the service and covered all seven standards. The authority has undertaken some awareness raising of private fostering arrangements within the local community. This has been further assisted by the appointment of a senior practitioner in November 2007. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of awareness of private fostering arrangements and the procedures to follow, even within the Children's Directorate of the authority. The authority has identified an independent boarding school, which places young people from abroad with families within the community. These are private fostering arrangements and the authority has developed a protocol with the school to ensure that all private fostering arrangements are notified to the authority. Nonetheless, the inspectors were informed that due to other demands on the service, not all private fostering arrangements have been assessed. Therefore the service is not providing the necessary safeguards to young people. This could potentially result in young people being left in unsafe placements.

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 Dudley MBC's 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 authority has developed policies and procedures to ensure that young people in private fostering arrangements are protected, however, these have only just been developed to ensure that they are in line with the private fostering arrangements regulations. The authority had not assessed all private fostering arrangements notified to them due to a lack of capacity. This could potentially put young people at risk. The authority undertook some initial awareness raising of private fostering arrangements in 2005 and 2006, however, as there has been no dedicated post in relation to private fostering arrangements due to budget pressures this work did not continue. The appointment, in November 2007, of a senior practitioner who is responsible for developing the authority's response to private fostering arrangements, has resulted in a new wave of awareness raising. Leaflets have been developed for professionals, parents, carers and young people, informing them of the need to notify arrangements to the local authority. An action plan has been developed as to how this information is to be promoted in the wider community. All information is available in different languages and formats so that it is accessible to all parts of the community. Records indicate that the authority does not routinely respond to notifications appropriately, with a number of arrangements not being assessed or the young person being visited. Records show that only two of the 12 arrangements known to the authority were visited by a social worker within the required timescales, these cases were notified to the authority in 2005 and 2006. Since this date notifications have not been dealt with appropriately, with two private fostering arrangements where young people were estranged from their families and five private fostering arrangements where young people from abroad and attending a local boarding school were not allocated to a social worker, with no visits taking place or assessments of suitability taking place. This could potentially result in young people being left in unsafe situations. The authority has developed detailed guidance as to what information is required in assessing the suitability of private fostering arrangements. One report viewed by the inspector, was detailed and included sufficient information to ensure that the manager signing off the report could be confident that the young person's needs will be met. In respect of another young person, a suitability report had still not been completed, although the young person had been in placement for over six months. There has been delays in making checks with the Criminal Record Bureau, this could result in young person being left in unsuitable placements and place them at risk of harm. There is some confusion regarding who signs off the suitability of arrangements. The authority's procedures refers to this being undertaken by the Designated Manager (private fostering), the Statement of Purpose indicates that it is the local team manager who is responsible for endorsing reports. Reports are also submitted to the fostering panel. The authority has not developed any written information for private foster carers, parents or young people as to what support is available from other agencies. The Statement of Purpose indicates that private foster carers can access training through the fostering service if necessary. However, the fostering service does not have the capacity to undertake this work at the present time. Those carers where there is an allocated social worker are provided with verbal advice and support regarding contact and how the carer can meet the young person's health and religious needs. Records indicate that where there is an allocated social worker, the young person is seen on a regular basis and appropriate advice given. There is no written information regarding advocacy services, which the young people can access if they need independent advice and support.

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.

Dudley MBC has developed a Statement of Purpose, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. It is an informative document and contains useful examples of types of private fostering arrangements. However, it does not clearly state who within the authority has expertise in private fostering arrangements whom social workers can contact for advice. It would also benefit from containing additional information regarding information and support available to young people who are privately fostered. A set of comprehensive procedures in respect of private fostering arrangements has been written but social workers acknowledge that they are not fully conversant with the procedures and are not confident that they would be able to recognise a private fostering arrangement. Potentially this could result in privately fostered young people not being identified and protected. Each young person has an individual file, however, private foster carers do not have a separate file, consequently confidential information about private foster carers is kept on the young person's file. This could result in a breach of confidentiality. The authority has developed two levels of audit, so that there is an independent reviewing and monitoring process in place to ensure that appropriate procedures have been followed regarding frequency of visits, decisions in relation to requirements, prohibitions, disqualifications and appeals. File audits will be the responsibility of the team manager and the Quality and Performance Manager will undertake monitoring as required under Regulation 12 of the Private Fostering Arrangements Regulations. At the time of the inspection an annual report, evaluating the work undertaken in relation to privately fostered children and whether the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, has not been presented to the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board or the Director of Children's Services. However, a report has been sent to the chair of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board in January 2008.

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):

-
- visit any young person who is privately fostered and undertake an assessment of the suitability of arrangements within prescribed timescales (NMS 3)
 - undertake appropriate checks in respect of private foster carers in a timely fashion (NMS 3)
 - clarify the arrangements for signing off suitability reports and ensure that this is accurately reflected in all documentation (NMS 3)
 - provide private foster carers with information regarding what support they can expect to receive (NMS 4)
 - provide young people with information regarding who they can contact if they have any concerns (NMS 6)
 - include in the Statement of Purpose information regarding the person social workers can contact for advice regarding private fostering arrangements (NMS 1)
 - include in the Statement of Purpose information regarding the support available to young people who are privately fostered (NMS 1)
 - ensure that all staff are aware of the service's Statement of Purpose, including their duties in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out (NMS 1)
 - maintain separate files for young people and private foster carers (NMS 7)
 - present a report to the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the work undertaken (NMS 7)
 - prepare an annual report for the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board on how the authority satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection (NMS 7).

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.