

Doncaster Private Fostering Arrangements Services

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Sarah Urding / Lynne Busby
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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

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council is responsible for managing all private fostering arrangements in the area. It is their responsibility to raise public awareness, assess and monitor placements, safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people who are privately fostered and to ensure that their needs are met. The service is based in the centre of Doncaster and at the time of inspection the Local Authority were aware of four young people in receipt of private fostering arrangements.

Summary

At this announced full inspection all key standards were inspected. All standards relate to Staying Safe and Organisation. There are no standards relating to Being Healthy, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution and Economic Wellbeing. The service has a well organised raising awareness plan in place and the suitability of private fostering arrangements are safely determined. The service is good at ensuring that full consultation and agreements are in place between children and young people, their parents and carers. Young people, carers and parents are given sound advice and good access to other resources so that arrangements are supported. The service promotes the resolution of issues between children and young people their parents and carers. However, the service has more weaknesses than strengths and children and young people are not being safeguarded because there is a delay in assessing the suitability of private fostering arrangements and some monitoring visits are not taking place every six weeks. There are no systems in place for monitoring the quality of service provided or for reporting on how the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded. Information about private fostering arrangements and publicity materials are not available in a range of languages and formats, which excludes potential groups of private foster carers, parents and communities.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable. This is the first inspection of the 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 inadequate.

Children and young people's welfare is promoted by a thorough assessment of suitability and good levels of support. However, delays in conducting initial assessments and a lack of appropriately formatted information about private fostering arrangements means that they are not adequately safeguarded. The local authority have a clearly set out and well organised plan for raising awareness of private fostering arrangements. There are a range of publicity leaflets, media campaigns and some positive work has been carried out by staff within schools, different communities and with immigration at the local airport. The plan clearly sets out how parents, staff and other agencies are to be made aware of their duties to notify the local authority. The materials identify a point of contact for notifications. However, publicity materials are not available in different languages and formats making them inaccessible to different

groups of private foster carers, parents and communities. There is a clear procedure in place for responding to notifications and for those arrangements that have not been notified. However, the local authority is not responding to all notifications in a timely fashion and a recent decision made to conduct visits three monthly within the first year of a private fostering arrangement does not adequately safeguard children who are privately fostered either. The local authority are required to address these shortfalls and a timescale of 07 October 2008 is given for a response to be made. The local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement. A thorough initial assessment is undertaken which includes a health and safety check of the premises. Individuals are checked initially through social services and police data, followed promptly by Criminal Records Bureau checks and references. Clear written arrangements are in place which demonstrate that children, parents and carers have been seen individually and are in agreement. The parameters of the arrangements meet the standards well. Reports are clear and enable informed decision making. Reports on suitability are currently being signed at managerial level. However, the person responsible for decision making is unclear and as a result, a number of managers are involved in this process. The lack of clarity and inconsistent practice increases the likelihood of issues being missed. Carers and young people feel that staff are offering them good levels of support and advice. They know how to contact a named worker and there is consistency in staff carrying out six weekly visits. Young people understand their rights and carers' responsibilities in relation to private fostering arrangements. The service works particularly positively in encouraging young people to maintain contact with their parents. Some positive work has been undertaken in improving relationships between parents and their children that have previously broken down. Young people are also accessed promptly to services, such as advocacy, counselling and anger management with a view to supporting arrangements and a return home. Carers are given sound advice in relation to financial support and staff work closely with the benefits department to ensure that carers receive their entitlements. Carers are also offered the same training as mainstream foster carers and have access to support groups. Information about private fostering arrangements is available for carers, parents and young people. However, this is not available in different languages and formats. Young people and carers say that they have been given this information verbally but have not read the leaflets because they do not look appealing. This may result in missed opportunities for support and advice.

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 service is poorly managed because roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined, policies and procedures are not fully implemented and systems are not in place for assessing quality or implementing safeguards. The statement of purpose does not accurately reflect how private fostering arrangements are being managed. Staff are not clear about where the responsibility for this service lies and as a result, there is some confusion as to roles and responsibilities,

particularly in relation to who is responsible for making decisions about the suitability of private fostering arrangements. This places children and young people at risk. Staff have received one briefing on private fostering arrangements and are well informed about the local authority's duties to raise awareness and notify of private fostering arrangements. Staff are also part of a forum that shares good practice with other local authorities about managing private fostering arrangements. However, staff are not as informed about roles in relation to safeguarding and promoting welfare of privately fostered children, and there is no further training planned in this area. This does not equip staff to effectively carry out their duties. Well organised and clear records are in place for each privately fostered child that meet the standards and regulation. These outline well the support and information given to children. Written reports demonstrate that children and young people are fully involved in their private fostering arrangements and that their wishes have been considered. The local authority are notifying the Department for Children, Families and Schools appropriately but have not yet established their own system for recording the number and nature of enquiries in relation to private fostering, the responses given and any action taken. As a result, there is limited internal overview as to how this service is being managed. Furthermore, there is no system in place for monitoring and evaluating the quality of service provided. This includes how the local authority will investigate any pattern of concern raised by children. Some work has been done to highlight shortfalls within the service, but this has not been shared with staff and timescales are not specific. The local authority are required to address this shortfall and a timescale of 07 October 2008 has been given for a response to be made. The local authority has not yet established and implemented a reporting mechanism to the Director of Children's Services, or Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board as to an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children or how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded. There has been only one report made in February 2007. This is not adequate to safeguard children's welfare nor keep practice under review.

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
2	arrange for an officer of the authority to visit the premises where a child is being cared for and accommodated within seven working days of notification (Regulation 7)	12 September 2008
2	arrange for an officer of the authority to visit every child who is being fostered privately in the first year of the arrangement at intervals of not more than six weeks (Regulation 8)	12 September 2008
7	monitor the way in which functions are discharged in relation to privately fostered children (Regulation 12, NMS 7.7).	12 September 2008

Recommendations

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

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- provide publicity materials in an appropriate range of languages and formats (NMS 2.2.2)
 - arrange for an officer of the authority to visit the premises where a child is being cared for and accommodated within seven working days of notification (NMS 2.3.1, Regulation 7)
 - arrange for an officer of the authority to visit every child who is being fostered privately in the first year of the arrangement at intervals of not more than six weeks (NMS 2.3.1, Regulation 8)
 - provide information about private fostering arrangements in different languages and formats for carers (NMS 4.3)
 - provide information about private fostering arrangements in different languages and formats for parents (NMS 5.3)
 - provide privately fostered children with information in formats appropriate to their age and understanding about their private foster carer and their responsibilities, the meaning of their privately fostered status and of their right to be safeguarded (NMS 6.2)
 - update the statement of purpose to include all aspects outlined in NMS 1, in particular name the decision maker and provide details as to how private fostering arrangements are being managed (NMS 1.2)
 - provide training to staff in relation to managing private fostering arrangements (NMS 1.4)
 - establish a system for recording the number and nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering arrangements, the responses given and action taken (NMS 7.6)
 - monitor the way in which functions are discharged in relation to privately fostered children (NMS 7.7, Regulation 12)
 - establish and implement a system for monitoring, investigating, any pattern of concern and take action to improve practice in the interests of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children (NMS 7.8)
 - establish and implement a system for reporting annually, for consideration by the Director of Children's Services which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of work in relation to privately fostered children (NMS 7.9)
 - establish and implement a system for reporting annually to the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board on how the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted and how other agencies are co-operated with in this regard (NMS 7.10).

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.