

Cumbria C.C. Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for la fostering agency

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Inspector	Helen Humphreys / Sarah Oldham
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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

Cumbria Children's Services at the time of the inspection were aware of three privately fostered children. These three children were being supported by family support workers who were based in Barrow and Whitehaven and are employed by Cumbria Children's services.

Summary

This was an announced inspection carried out by two inspectors over two days. The inspection included an interview with the head of service, a general manager who has been involved in developing the work, three family support workers and one team manager. The case files of three privately fostered children were reviewed. Also viewed were the newly devised policies and procedures, a report written by a project worker, the Annual Quality Assurance Assessment and data Set which was submitted in January 2006 and the update to these documents.

Interviews were held in the Kendal and Barrow office.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This service was last inspected in May 2006 and since that time a limited amount of work has been undertaken. However, the improvements that have been made are noted. Cumbria seconded a project worker to undertake a review of the work, between September 2006 and March 2007 and this resulted in a report which identified the further work required by Cumbria. To that end a job description and person specification for the role of nominated officer has been devised and funding has been agreed and the service is hopeful that this appointment can be made swiftly. New policies and procedures have been devised but as yet not implemented. A range of leaflets have been created for young people and carers and others have been distributed to a range of professionals in education and health services. Information is available on the external web site for Cumbria children's services. More of the staff who were interviewed on this occasion were aware of private fostering and there has been a slight increase in the number of cases known to Cumbria.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Although Cumbria has undertaken some work to notify relevant authorities about the private fostering arrangements there is no formal written system in place. Cumbria does not yet have a system in place for dealing with disqualifications or where a family or individual has failed to make a notification. The newly written procedures are clear and detailed and set out clearly what a member of staff would be required to do when dealing with a private fostering arrangement. The procedures set out a range of matters to ensure that accommodation where a young person is staying is appropriate and it is suggested that risk assessment could be undertaken as required. The procedures also advise the worker that appropriate checks should be taken on the carers, but does actually set out what they should do, for example how to undertake a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure. The files seen, recorded what the staff had

done to ensure that health and education needs were being met and their overall improvement with regards to education, was noted in all cases reviewed. The assessments varied in style and quality. Two of the assessments followed the previous procedures and had been agreed at managerial level and were detailed and robust. The young people in the cases reviewed were being visited regularly and had access to additional services including counselling and financial 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.

Cumbria accept that they have more work to undertake in order to comply with the regulations and standards in relation to private fostering. However there are some improvements noted and senior staff indicate that Cumbria are committed to ensuring that they have robust procedures in place. Cumbria does not as yet have a nominated officer to undertake this work in an appropriate way. Two senior managers, in addition to their other work, have undertaken some work and in particular have produced a set of suitable policies and procedures which have been agreed. However, these have not been implemented and were not known to staff who were working with young people who were privately fostered. Cumbria has not as yet written a statement of purpose and inspectors were advised that this will be undertaken by the nominated officer when in post. Staff have not undertaken any training or formal briefing in relation to private fostering and the knowledge and standard of work varied with some good practice noted. At yet there are no systems in place for monitoring any of the work or the effectiveness of the notification system. However, the three young people who were known to Cumbria as privately fostered children were very satisfied with their placements and care arrangements. Their outcomes as result of living with these carers were positive and they were being visited and supported regularly by family support workers.

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, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 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):

- create an effective and robust notification system
- provide additional information for staff on how to undertake relevant checks including criminal records bureau disclosures.
- implement the revised policies and procedures.
- provide training or briefing for staff on the private fostering arrangements.
- appoint a suitable person to be the nominated officer for private fostering.
- create a statement of purpose which meets the national minimum standards.
- create an effective monitoring system to ensure compliance with the standards and regulations.