

# London Borough of Croydon Private Fostering

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Elisabeth Brunton
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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**

Private fostering is dealt with by the referral and assessment service within Croydon Council's Department for Children, Young People and Learners. A specialist social worker within this service takes responsibility for the work. At the time of the inspection, approximately 18 privately fostered young people were known to the council.

### **Summary**

Referrals of privately fostered young people are now promptly dealt with and the suitability of private foster carers assessed. Young people are visited but not always as regularly as required and advice and support is given to private foster carers, young people and their parents. Staff with particular responsibility for private fostering are knowledgeable and training for all staff is planned. Some promotion of awareness of private fostering has taken place but a programme of communication activities is not currently in place. The service has a statement about private fostering and file records are maintained, though not all reports are sufficiently comprehensive. Limited monitoring of the work is undertaken and the required reports on private fostering have been prepared.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

This is the first inspection.

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

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

The council employed a specialist worker who took the lead on private fostering during 2005 and 2006. This worker informed other services about private fostering and distributed posters and leaflets. These communication activities largely ceased when this worker left post in late 2006. Another specialist social worker was recruited in November 2007 and she has made some initial contacts, with the support of a new management team. New and informative leaflets have been designed for private foster carers, young people, their parents and professionals. The number of private foster carers so far identified in Croydon is low and the service does not currently have a programme of communication activities in place. Those private fostering arrangements known to the service have been referred by other agencies. New referrals and notifications received by the service during 2007 and prior to the recruitment of the second specialist worker were not responded to promptly, due to pressure on the council's duty and assessment service at that time. However, one referral where there were possible child protection concerns was responded to within a shorter time-scale. Once in post, the specialist social worker visited private foster homes promptly and spoke to young people. Referrals and notifications of private fostering arrangements are now passed straight to the specialist worker and receive a prompt response. The specialist worker and her manager work within the council's duty and

assessment service for children. They have raised awareness of private fostering within this group of staff so that referrals of private fostering arrangements are recognised. The service has relatively few ongoing private fostering arrangements which require regular visiting, as most arrangements have been referred fairly recently. Visits are made but not always as often as required by the regulations. The service is dealing appropriately with a case where a private foster carer is not co-operating with the service's requests to see the child. The need to prohibit private fostering arrangements, impose requirements or disqualifications has not so far arisen in Croydon. Staff are confident that they could quickly obtain the necessary advice and guidance should one of these courses of action become necessary. Staff have worked hard to achieve a satisfactory outcome in situations where young people's welfare is not being satisfactorily safeguarded or promoted in private foster homes. The service establishes the suitability of private fostering arrangements through initial assessments. These are now normally completed within seven days and signed off by the manager. Young people are seen as part of initial assessments but their wishes and feelings are not always clearly included in assessment reports. Initial assessment reports include those matters listed under schedule 3 to the regulations though it is often not possible to contact parents to establish the proposed duration of private fostering arrangements and how decisions are to be made regarding the young person. Also, as assessments are at the initial level only, some matters are not dealt with in sufficient depth, such as the capacity of private foster carers to look after the young person. Core assessments of private fostering arrangements are not currently undertaken. Private foster carers and adult members of their households are required to undergo checks with the Criminal Records Bureau and arrangements are now in place to process these without delay. Though numbers are currently small, those private foster carers identified in Croydon are provided with support and advice over safeguarding and meeting the needs of young people in their care. They are given information about other services available and are referred to these where appropriate. Private foster carers are given contact details for the specialist social worker who is responsible for visiting them and are encouraged to facilitate contact between young people and their families. Limited financial assistance is given, normally as one-off payments for items such as bed, bedding or school uniform. More extensive financial support is given in some situations where alternative arrangements need to be made for young people. Private foster carers are provided with some written information about private fostering but training is not yet made available. The service has contact details for few parents of privately fostered young people though efforts are made to obtain these. Those parents with whom the service is in contact are given information about private fostering. Some parents are referred to other agencies for help with parenting skills and others are encouraged to take responsibility for moving their children from unsuitable private fostering arrangements. Parents are given contact details for the specialist social worker. Privately fostered young people also have contact details for the social worker and say that they receive good support. Young people are referred to other agencies for additional help and support, where necessary. A new information leaflet has recently been produced for young people. However, information is not given about advocacy services or the council's arrangements for providing young people with advice and assistance beyond the age of 16.

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

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

## Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

## Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

## Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

There is currently a draft statement of purpose but this does not include all the information listed under the standard. Staff with particular responsibility for private fostering now have sound knowledge and understanding of the council's duties and functions and have disseminated information amongst other relevant staff. Policy and procedure is in place and is being updated. Training in private fostering is not currently provided but there are plans to include this in the induction training for all staff joining children's services. Records are maintained for each private foster carer and privately fostered young person and these are currently retained within the same file. Those reports required by regulation are on file but do not always include all the recommended information. Records are maintained about the numbers of private fostering arrangements identified within the borough. Individual case files are monitored by managers but this does not include all the matters recommended by the standards. A report describing the council's private fostering work has recently been provided for the Director of Children's Services and the chair of the local safeguarding children board. One of the assistant directors is the designated monitoring officer for private fostering.

## 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):

- develop and resource a programme of communication activities to inform the general public and other agencies about private fostering. (NMS 2.2.1)
- ensure that subsequent visits to privately fostered young people are made in accordance with the regulations. (Regulation 8.1)
- ensure that the capacity of proposed private foster carers to look after a young person and other relevant matters are fully assessed, by undertaking core assessments in addition to the initial assessments currently carried out. (NMS 3.3)

- provide privately fostered young people with information about advocacy services and the council's arrangements for providing advice and assistance beyond the age of 16. (NMS 6)
- amend the council's statement on private fostering to include all the recommended standards. (NMS 1.2)
- ensure that reports required by regulation include all the recommended matters. (NMS 7.3)
- arrange to regularly review a sample of private fostering records to check compliance with the regulations and standards. (NMS 7.7)

## **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.**