



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Calderdale Council - Private Fostering

**1 Park Road
HALIFAX
HX1 2TU**

Lead Inspector
Jacqui Malcolm

Key Announced Inspection
27th November 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
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This is a report of an inspection to assess local authority private fostering arrangements against the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. These standards can be found at www.dfes.gov.uk. The NMS specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in the fulfilment of their duties and functions in relation to private fostering under the Children Act 1989. Along with the new measures in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 and the 2005 regulations, they are intended to better focus local authorities' attention on private fostering, in part by requiring them to take a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area.

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life.

Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above. The Private Fostering National Minimum Standards are mapped to just two of these outcomes, Staying Safe and Management.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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Local Authority INFORMATION

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SUMMARY

Calderdale Fostering Service

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

This inspection was carried out as part of the inspection of Calderdale Council Fostering Service. Discussions took place with the principle officer (child protection), a child-care manager and social work staff from the area's Initial Response Team, which is based in the centre of Halifax. A visit and telephone contact was also made to the private foster carers who responded to the contact made to them. In addition, the case records were examined and the principle officer made a range of documents, including policies and procedures available for inspection.

Private fostering is being given a higher profile and a good start has been made by the local authority to promote awareness in the community to notify them if they know of any adults who are looking after children and young people who are privately fostered. At the time of the inspection, there were three young people known by the local authority to be privately fostered. Private foster carers who were contacted spoke positively about the support they had received from the local authority and the social workers allocated to these cases were clearly aware about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people whose carers were being assessed at the time.

What the local authority does well:

- The profile of private fostering has been raised and the local authority had undertaken a recent publicity campaign that went out to various professionals and organisations in the community, for example, schools, libraries, doctor's surgeries, day nurseries and social services offices. There is good child-focussed information available for children and young people that explains what it is like to be privately fostered and what their rights are.
- The local authority is responding well to notifications that are known to be private fostering arrangements.
- Senior managers are committed to improving and developing the systems in place. They appear to be committed to make sure that monitoring systems are improved so that the numbers and circumstances of privately fostered children and young people are tracked and the assessments of the carers are properly agreed at the suitable management level.
- Team managers in the service audit the case files.

- The local authority is professionally managed by staff who have experience in private fostering and the social work staff are professionally qualified, experienced and aware about their roles and responsibilities in the area of private fostering.

What has improved since the last inspection?

- This is the first inspection of the local authority private fostering service.

What they could do better:

- The Initial Response Team and area teams currently deal with all referrals in respect of private fostering arrangements, in addition to child protection and crisis intervention work, which will take priority. Consideration should be given to transferring this work to the fostering team where there is some similarity in the work and consistency can be developed.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Staying Safe

Management

Staying Safe

The intended outcome for these Standards are:

(NMS 2) The local authority is notified about privately fostered children living in its area.

(NMS 3) The welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted

(NMS 4) 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 5) The local authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.

(NMS 6) 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.

The Commission considers that all these Standards should be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for the following Standard(s):

2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been reached using all the available information, including a visit to the service.

The systems in place to respond to notifications are clear and children/young people known by the local authority to be privately fostered are considered safe and the local authority offers appropriate advice and support.

EVIDENCE:

The local authority has a written statement that includes a clear definition of a private fostering arrangement with examples and information about how they should be notified. In September 2006, a publicity campaign was implemented to raise awareness about private fostering, targeting the community and other professional agencies. The publicity material seen is informative and provides relevant information about the private fostering process. It advises about the

action that needs to be taken if it applies to them and who they need to contact in the local authority for further details. There is also a child-friendly and informative guide for children and young people about being privately fostered. This includes contact information if they are unhappy with their care. The report to the local authorities safeguarding board states that information was also placed on the council intranet and in a weekly "electronic package" to all schools. The publicity campaign was reported to be successful and the local authority plans to repeat it on a yearly basis.

Information contained in the written statement, policy, case files and from discussions with managers and social workers indicate that when notifications are received by the local authority, the checklist for private fostering is completed by an initial response team duty social worker to ascertain whether the arrangement is private fostering. If this is the case, it is allocated by a team manager to a social worker from the Initial Response Team to visit and assess the situation to satisfy themselves that the child/young person's welfare was being safeguarded. Social workers spoken with described the process of making the visits and doing the appropriate checks in accordance with the regulations. Where there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child/young person, the team manager will, in consultation with the legal department, take action to safeguard the child/young person.

At the time of the inspection, all of the carer's assessments were ongoing. Carers spoken with confirmed that they had been visited by social workers and case files showed that children/young people had also been consulted to gather their wishes and feelings and the carers accommodation was also checked as part of the assessment. One private foster carer spoken with said that they had been looking after a young person without knowledge that they needed to notify the local authority, however, once they were informed about this requirement by school they took action and they were visited within 7 days by a social worker to be assessed as a private foster carer.

The carers spoken with were positive about the social work contact and understood why they were involved and how to contact them and who to contact when they were not available. Information seen in case files and discussions with social workers and carers confirmed that they, along with parents are appropriately contacted, advised and supported and social workers would establish whether the placements would be short or long term. In all cases, the young people who were living with private foster carers were registered with health professionals and were in full-time education and social workers and private foster carers said that they had attended education and meetings. Additional support was also available to young people who needed to access specialist services, for example, Child and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Sure Start, etc.

There was evidence that contact arrangements with parents were in place and financial arrangements had been agreed with the carer and the parent. The

manager said that some financial assistance would be offered to carers if this was necessary to support the placement.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- (NMS 1) Relevant staff are aware of local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering.
- (NMS 7) The local authority monitors the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

The Commission considers that all these standards should be inspected

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

1, 7.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been reached using all the available information, including a visit to the service.

All relevant staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities in private fostering work and appropriate management systems are in place.

EVIDENCE:

The local authority has developed a written statement, which sets out the duties and functions of private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. All relevant staff spoken with were very clear about their responsibility to make sure that the local authorities duties and functions in relation to private fostering are followed through and evidence of this was seen in the case files and confirmed by comments made by carers.

The responsibility for assessing and managing private fostering arrangements lies with the local authorities Initial Response Team and Area Teams. At present, the number of private fostering assessments is small and may not have a great impact, however, as the numbers of notifications increase, there is a risk that child-protection and crisis intervention work will take priority and the fostering team should be considered as the more appropriate location for this work.

The local authority keeps case records of private fostering arrangements and the documents available in the private fostering pack follow the local authority's procedure. The team managers audited these. Although the assessments were not complete, the information contained on the case files reported on the visits and included information about the contacts made to

parents, private foster carers and the young people. Social workers also assessed the suitability of carer's homes and comments were noted in one of the case files, particularly where improvements were needed with respect to health and safety matters.

The local authority reported this year to the Independent Chair of the Calderdale Safeguarding Board about the activity of privately fostered children in the area. This report was seen and provided an update of the work done to appropriately safeguarded and promote the welfare of young people who are privately fostered. The local authority also identified improvements that are needed to improve the management monitoring systems so that the numbers and circumstances of privately fostered children/young people can be tracked and the assessments of the carers are agreed at the appropriate management level.

The principle officer confirmed that management information is submitted to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on a yearly basis.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

N/A

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

N/A

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

N/A

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

N/A

EVIDENCE:

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

STAYING SAFE		MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	3	1	3
3	3	7	3
4	3		
5	3		
6	3		

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last inspection? Not Applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Local Authority to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	PF1	Consideration should be given to transferring responsibility for private fostering work from the childcare social work teams to the fostering team.

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