

Blackpool Borough Council - Childrens Services (Private Fostering Arrangements)

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

Unique reference number	SC072382
Inspection date	2 March 2009
Inspector	Sarah Oldham
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Blackpool Borough Council Progress House Clifton Road BLACKPOOL FY4 4US
Telephone number	01253 477526
Email	
Registered person	Blackpool Borough Council
Registered manager	Claire Samuels
Responsible individual	David McCombe
Date of last inspection	

© Crown copyright 2009

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

The Children's Services Department of Blackpool Council is responsible for implementing the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The service works with other relevant agencies to promote the awareness of private fostering within the community and to ensure that notifications of private fostering arrangements are made. The Children's service field work teams undertake assessments to determine the suitability of arrangements made and to monitor these to ensure that the welfare of children and young people is promoted and safeguarded.

Summary

This inspection was the first inspection of the private fostering arrangements to assess how the local authority had met its obligations to privately fostered children since 2005.

The Children's Services Department has policies and procedures in place to identify how they will meet their responsibilities in managing private fostering arrangements. Safeguarding procedures have not always been good due to some delays in completing assessments and delays in undertaking Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures as soon as arrangements become known. Practice is reviewed and improvements made where shortfalls are identified.

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 of the 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 satisfactory.

The Children's Service Department has undertaken a wide range of activities to raise the awareness of the definition of private fostering arrangements. This has included training and information to staff within children's services, including education and early years, as well as with police and health care professionals. In addition the service has raised awareness within the community by a range of information posters, letters and general information. Information is provided in English, Polish and Chinese. The number of notifications has risen, although the local authority is aware that ongoing publicity and information needs to be made available. To address this the local authority has an ongoing communications and awareness strategy statement in place that is kept under review.

Policies, procedures and systems are in place to promote and safeguard the welfare of the children within private fostering arrangements. The lead for private fostering was originally with the fostering service, however, responsibility has now been transferred to the children's social work field teams for receiving notifications and assessing the suitability of carers.

Notifications have come directly from private foster carers and parents. Most of the assessments of private foster carers have been completed within the agreed timescales, however, there has been at least one incident when the assessment has not commenced for a substantial period of time and appropriate checks have not been undertaken. This means that children have been placed with carers who have not been assessed and does not adequately protect children. Systems have now been put in place to ensure that all private fostering arrangements are effectively monitored by team managers.

The social work team complete an initial visit and then undertake a more comprehensive assessment, this includes obtaining enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures. However, the integrated assessment format completed by social workers does not clearly identify when a CRB has been undertaken and this could place young people at risk if appropriate checks are not clearly documented as being undertaken.

The assessment undertaken assesses the ability of the prospective carers to provide support and care to the young person, the suitability of the premises, and the wishes and feelings of the child are obtained. Arrangement for finances is also discussed to ensure that the prospective carers have an appropriate agreement in place with parents to provide financial support for the child. Contact arrangements are also discussed to ensure that contact is maintained for the young person.

Foster carers and children receive ongoing support from the social workers. Both carers and children know their social workers, and report that they feel that they are accessible and helpful. Ongoing support and reviews of the placement are undertaken appropriately.

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.

The service has information regarding private fostering and there is procedural guidance provided to staff involved in delivering the service. The information contained within the communications and awareness strategy includes most of the information that is required within the statement of purpose. However, this document needs to include all information as identified in the NMS for Private Fostering, including the training and support that will be provided to private foster carers. Training throughout the local authority for staff and external resources is clearly demonstrated in the documentation. All documentation is easily available on computer to ensure that social work staff follow procedures.

The local authority monitors all private fostering arrangements. This includes notifications, referrals, assessments and ongoing arrangements. Files are maintained on the integrated format computer system and the lead for private fostering, along with team managers, review information recorded. It has been identified through this monitoring system, where there has

been ongoing issues with assessments and appropriate responses have been put into place. The views of the young people placed are gained and young people are seen individually as well as with their private foster carers. The service has good links with other agencies to ensure that support and information is provided in other ways, including links with education and health. This is to ensure that information regarding private fostering is made widely available.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Children and young people remain within their own culture and wherever possible, continue to attend their own schools. Information regarding the service is made available in other languages. Private foster carers are given support and guidance about where to access support that they may need to help meet children's individual needs. All professionals working with children in the area have been informed about the need to make the local authority aware of any arrangements that come to their attention.

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):

- ensure that CRB and other checks for private foster carers are carried out promptly to protect children and young people placed (NMS 3.2.6)
- ensure that the appropriate action is taken on receipt of a notification and assessments are completed in accordance with the regulations (NMS 2.3.1)
- ensure the statement which sets out the duties and functions in relation to private fostering contains clear and current information (NMS 1.2)
- ensure that the local authority identifies its duties and functions, with regards private fostering, in induction and other training programmes. These programmes are annually reviewed in line with changes in legislation and guidance (NMS 1.4).