

# Wirral Borough Council Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC068565
<b>Inspection date</b>	18 July 2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Jeffrey Banham
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Address</b>	Metropolitan Borough of Wirral Education Department Hamilton Building Conway Street BIRKENHEAD Merseyside CH41 4FD
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 666 4696
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Children & Young Person's Department
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	1 January 1900

---

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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](http://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**

Overall responsibility for private fostering arrangements is held by the council's Children and Young Person's Department. Procedures were developed and introduced in 2005 and re-launched in July 2008. The recently designated lead officer is part of the safeguarding section, and a private fostering officer has been appointed to develop the service. Responsibility for the assessments of children and private foster carers rests with the social workers in the children and families' teams.

### **Summary**

This inspection was announced and examined all of the National Minimum Standards in relation to private fostering arrangements. The local authority's response to the implementation of the private fostering procedures has not been consistent or effective. Staff are not clear about the policies or their responsibilities. Procedures are not applied in accordance with National Minimum Standards or The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. Current practice does not provide the necessary framework within which children in private fostering arrangements can be deemed to be safe. The local authority has recognised that its practices have been and are deficient, a private fostering officer has been appointed and a lead manager designated to oversee the development of the service. The recognition of the need for improvement has not yet been translated into standard operational practice and significant improvements are needed in order to provide even the basic elements of safeguarding for children.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

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

This is the first inspection of the local authority's arrangements for private fostering.

### **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.

The local authority produced some publicity leaflets when the private fostering arrangements were first introduced but since then there has been no overall publicity or training strategy to inform members of the public and other agencies involved in the care of children. The policies and procedures for private fostering were recently re-launched within the agency but the anticipated number of representatives from other agencies did not all attend. Although information was published in the local press about the re-launch the absence of an overall development campaign has resulted in a lack of clarity, understanding and awareness amongst staff in all agencies about the correct response to private fostering arrangements. Social workers are not clear about the definition of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement. Procedures to determine the suitability of private fostering arrangements are not implemented consistently. For example foster carers are not subject to assessments about their suitability. In some cases even the most basic safeguarding elements are not present. Checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) are not routinely undertaken and health and safety checks on carers' households

are not completed. Carers are not always clear about the availability of delegated consent to medical treatment for the children for whom they care. Visits to children are not undertaken in accordance with the frequency required by the regulations, nor are reports written following those visits that do take place. Care planning procedures are not systematically applied by social workers involved with the supervision of children. In one case a child was accommodated with foster carers under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and then moved to the care of a relative. There was no evidence that this option had been previously explored. The child did not have a care plan. The new carer was not subject to an assessment as to their suitability, there were no CRB checks on any member of the household, and no health and safety checks on the premises. Although there are examples of practice that conform to some procedures these are not consistently applied or understood throughout the service and are significant by their absence in some others. The local authority's procedures and practices in relation to private fostering are not sufficiently robust. They do not support or promote the effective implementation of the National Minimum Standards. Although the service has undertaken an emergency audit of each case involving private fostering arrangements the current practice of the local authority in response to private fostering arrangements does not yet provide the necessary framework within which the care of children can be deemed to be safe.

### **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 response by the local authority to the management and implementation of the private fostering arrangements has not created a foundation for safe and effective practice. There has not, until the beginning of this year, been a nominated lead officer. There has been no effective strategy for publicity or the raising of awareness amongst members of the public or relevant agencies involved with the care of children. The procedures, introduced in 2005, have not been reviewed and do not provide a sufficiently robust framework for the consistent delivery of practice. There are, for example, no specific assessments of foster carers covering the matters detailed in Schedule 3 of the regulations. The suitability of carers is not signed off at an appropriate managerial level and children and carers do not have their own files. There is no overall written statement or plan setting out the duties and functions in relation to private fostering. There has been no annual report produced for consideration by either the Director of Children's Services or the Local Children Safeguarding Board. The local authority has recognised to some extent that there are deficiencies in the way the service currently operates. A private fostering officer has been appointed and a lead manager has now been designated. They have undertaken an audit of practice and have identified significant deficiencies in practice. Changes in practice have not yet had time to bed in and become evident in individual cases. As a result there is to be a review of procedures and the first annual report will be presented

in September. Deficiencies in the service are beginning to be addressed by the designated lead officer. There is however no formally agreed development plan for individual cases and the service overall to provide a strategic framework within which the service can prioritise its tasks and progress.

## 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 the authority has a written statement or plan which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering (NMS 1)
- ensure all relevant staff have an appropriate understanding of the local authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering (NMS 1)
- ensure that accurate, comprehensive, well-organised and confidential records are kept for each privately fostered child and each private foster carer (NMS 7)
- ensure that records contain the reports required by the regulations (NMS 7)
- ensure that an annual written report is provided for the Director of Children's Services and the Local Children's Safeguarding Board and it includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children in its area (NMS 7)
- ensure that the local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering service in accordance with the regulations (NMS 3)

## 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.**