

# Lancashire County Council Private Fostering Arrangements Services

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Jeffrey Banham
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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**

Lancashire County Council has established its policies and procedures in relation to the discharge of its duties under the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering Regulations) that came into force on July 1st 2005. The local authority responds to notifications of private fostering arrangements using initial and core assessments to determine the needs of children. Identified managers sign off the suitability of arrangements. The authority has produced a private fostering development plan.

### **Summary**

The local authority has carried out a detailed audit of its policies, procedures and practices in relation to private fostering arrangements. The audit recognised the need for improvements in a number of areas. As a result of this audit a development plan has been put in place to ensure more effective implementation of the National Minimum Standards and regulations. In addition new management structures, within which the service is to be delivered and monitored, have been created. These new systems have not yet had sufficient time to fully impact on all parts of the service. Some aspects of practice, such as the obtaining of every Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check on private foster carers, the assessment of a child in need and the creation of formal agreements between parents and private foster carers to determine the duration of arrangements are not yet always fully implemented. The service recognises that further work remains to be done and is taking the actions necessary for continuing improvement. All children in private fostering placements are safe and their welfare is promoted.

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 local authority has promoted the awareness of the responsibilities of relevant staff in understanding their roles in making notifications of private fostering arrangements. Levels of staff awareness have not always enabled it effectively to determine the suitability of arrangements within the required timescales. In one case for example, the case record noted that staff involved with the family "...had not recognised the arrangements as being private fostering, hence the late referral for assessment". The authority's own internal audit concluded that evidence of CRB checks being completed could not be identified in any of the four cases examined. Further work has been done in publishing information and staff training in order for staff to be able to identify private fostering arrangements and make early notification in order to protect children. The numbers of notifications is increasing as more private fostering arrangements are identified. Although the wishes and feelings of children about their placement are established and recorded it is not evident in every case that children are clear about their situation, particularly where relationships with their own parents are problematic or complex.

Children are being not routinely offered advocacy in such cases where they may be in need of independent and effective support. There are cases where the duration of the arrangements has not been established and where private foster carers suffer financial hardship as the support to be provided by the parent is not agreed or not forthcoming. The absence of formal agreements in some private fostering arrangements puts all parties, particularly children, in a vulnerable situation. The suitability of private foster carers to ensure the safety of children placed is not always clear. For example, detailed information of the suitability of the accommodation has not been provided and the views of, or potential impact on, children already in the household are not recorded. The distinction between private fostering arrangement and the placement of a child in need, is not always effectively established. In some cases the welfare of children is compromised by the lack of robust care planning, the appropriate assessment of carers and the timely provision of adequate practical and financial support. The audit of practice conducted by the local authority has identified the areas where practice has not met the required standards. A service development plan has been put into place and the changes necessary to meet the National Minimum Standards have been implemented. Staff are aware of their responsibilities and all private fostering arrangements are subject to case review. The reviewing process ensures that children in placement are safe and their welfare is promoted.

### **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 conclusions of the annual report to the Local Safeguarding Board and a subsequent detailed internal audit of the private fostering arrangements identified the need for the local authority to take significant action to address issues of practice that were not meeting the National Minimum Standards. The audit proposed a number of recommendations. These included for example the need for all carers and people in the household over 16 to have a Criminal Record Bureau check, the need to comply with the timescales for assessment of the suitability of arrangements and for a regular review of records to monitor compliance. The recommendations have been accepted and incorporated into the Private Fostering Development Plan 2008-2009. This sets out the framework within which the development of the service is now based. The local authority's statement clearly sets out its duties and functions and contains all the information required in the appropriate standard. The internal audit has identified the need for all relevant staff and staff in partner agencies to be aware of their duties and responsibilities towards private fostering arrangements and for staff to be able to identify private fostering arrangements when they occur. The implementation of the revised policies and procedures is designed to enhance and monitor the safeguarding process to promote the safety and welfare of children in private fostering arrangements.

## 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):

- ensure that the local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with the regulations.
- ensure that the local authority takes appropriate action on receipt of a notification and carries out subsequent visits in accordance with the regulations.
- ensure that privately fostered children are given information about advocacy services if they are assessed as being a child in need.

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## 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.**