

## Statement on Private Fostering

### Introduction

OPDS mainly places children from boarding schools in homestay arrangements for less than 28 days. In these cases no private fostering arrangement is needed.

However, occasionally there are some children who may require homestay facilities for 28 days or more. These children need to be registered with the local authority and a private fostering arrangement (PFA) needs to be set up.

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (with no involvement of the Local Authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or 18 years, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative, with the intention that the fostering arrangement should last for a period of 28 days or more. In this regard, the overarching responsibility for the Safeguarding, Child Protection and promoting welfare remains with the parent and OPDS.

### Procedure

OPDS carefully selects all homestays who meet specific criteria to host students in their care. We will inform the Local Authority (LA) of the arrangements when private fostering is required, and, in turn, the LA will issue a confirmatory letter of notification to OPDS. A copy of this and any other letters for the PFA will be kept in the students' care folders.

OPDS will inform the Local Authority of all arrangements for private fostering, in line with Reg.3 (2), and will ensure the homestay family is aware of the specific requirements from the LA.

Once the Local Authority receives notification of a prospective private fostering arrangement they must arrange for a social worker to carry out the following checks within seven days to establish whether the arrangement is suitable:

- visit the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated
- visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and people living with them
- visit and speak to the child alone to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings unless the officer considers it inappropriate
- speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit the parent or person with Parental Responsibility for the child
- investigate any other matters the social worker believes to be relevant such as whether an agreement for financial arrangements and for the care and maintenance of the child have been reached, including arrangements for the child's education

The social worker must ensure that the intended duration of the fostering arrangement is understood and agreed by both the parents of the child and the proposed private foster carer.

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Local Authorities responsible for safeguarding and protecting children are required to ensure that foster carers are suitable and that they get any support and guidance they may need to help them care for the child. OPDS follows strict guidelines on safer recruitment and follows up with Safeguarding support and training.

Each Local Authority, despite following national guidelines on Private Fostering Arrangements, will often act slightly differently and OPDS will do their best to inform homestays about the detailed procedures undertaken by the LA they will be dealing with.

OPDS must notify the appropriate Local Authority at least six weeks before the arrangement is to begin. In an emergency situation, however, the Local Authority must be notified immediately we are aware of the need for a PFA.

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