

West Berkshire Council Children and Family Services

Private Fostering- A quick guide

1. What is private fostering?

Private fostering is the term used when someone who is not a parent or a 'close relative' (eg. great aunt, cousin, mum's friend or a neighbour) is looking after a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if they are disabled) for 28 days or more in their own home. It also covers children who stay at a residential school for more than two weeks of the school holidays.

A relative is defined in the Children Act 1989 as a grandparent, uncle or aunt (whether by full-blood, half-blood or by marriage or civil partnership), sibling or step-parent.

Common situations in which children are privately fostered include:

- Children with parents or families overseas
- Children with parents working or studying in the UK
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- Trafficked children
- Local children living apart from their families
- Adolescents and teenagers
- Children attending language schools
- Children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for holidays
- Children brought in from abroad with a view to adoption

In these situations the local council's Children's Services department must be informed. A social worker will visit the home to speak to the carer and the child to ensure the child is safe, carry out background checks and make sure support is being provided.

Birth parents, private foster carers and persons who are arranging for a child to be privately fostered are required by law to notify the local council's Children's Services department of the arrangement.

2. Independent Schools and Private Fostering

Children who are educated at independent schools will fall under private fostering arrangements only when they remain in school (or in a placement arranged by the school) for longer than two weeks of any holiday period. Term time attendance does not constitute private fostering.

Children who may be privately fostered:

- A child under the age of 16 or 18 if disabled, who is a pupil at an independent school and lives at the school during school holidays for a period of more than two weeks, will be treated as privately fostered.
- Arrangements made by parents for their children to be privately cared for in order that they can attend school on a daily basis may constitute private fostering if the length of stay is 28 days or more.
- Some children at Independent schools spend holiday periods with host families. These arrangements may be considered private fostering if the length of stay is 28 days or more.
- Where parents make arrangements for children from abroad to be privately accommodated for holiday periods, these arrangements may constitute private fostering.

3. Independent Schools and Guardianship Organisations

Guardianship organisations provide "guardians" with whom children who are at boarding school can live when the school closes during the holidays and the child is unable to return to live with his/her parents. This usually applies to children whose parents are abroad and, for whatever reason, cannot have the child back with them. Where such arrangements are intended to last for more than 28 consecutive days then they should be treated as a private fostering arrangement.