



**CSCP**

CROYDON SAFEGUARDING  
CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

# **Private Fostering Annual Report**

## **2024-25**

July 2025

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1.** This annual report sets out the work undertaken by the London Borough of Croydon in respect of its duties and responsibilities towards children living in Private Fostering arrangements as set out in the Children Act 1989 (Schedule 8), the children Act 2004 and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.
- 1.2.** This report is being provided under the requirements laid down in the National Minimum standards for Private Fostering which came into force in July 2005.
  - Section 7.9 - The Local Authority provides that a report is written each year for consideration by the Director of Children Services which includes an evaluation of the outcome of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.
  - Section 7.10 - The Local Authority reports annually to the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership about how the Local Authority cooperates with other agencies in this connection.
- 1.3.** This report gives an overview of the activities in relation to privately fostered children in the London Borough of Croydon from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. It also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote local awareness of the notification requirement from other agencies of children who are living in a Private Fostering arrangement.

## **2. Definition of a Private Fostering Arrangement**

- 2.1.** A definition of a Private Fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative, with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. A Private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. However, a person who is a close relative under the Children Act 1989, i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, and aunt or step-parent by marriage will not be a private foster carer. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carers should be continuous, but if the child receives an occasional short break this is not considered to break that continuity.
- 2.2.** In a Private Fostering arrangement, the parent retains parental responsibility for the child or young person.
- 2.3.** Private Fostering arrangements are diverse; examples of arrangements of Private Fostering include:
- Children and young people sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their education opportunity;
  - Teenagers who are staying in short-term arrangements with friends or other non- relatives;
  - Language students living with host families;
  - A parent who has chronic health problems who arranges for her child live with a friend for a period over 28 days;
  - A parent working away for more than 28 days at a time, who arranges for his children to live with an extended member of the family, even if they return to live with the parent for the period they return.
- 2.4.** Local Authorities do not formally approve or register private foster carers. However, it is the duty of the local Authority to satisfy themselves that the welfare of the children who are, or will be, privately fostered in the area is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. *Children (private arrangement for fostering) Regulations 2005*

## **3. Governance and Accountability**

- 3.1.** The lead for Private Fostering is based within Specialist Services and specifically based within the Family and Friends, Post Order Support team.
- 3.2.** The Private Fostering statement of purpose has been updated in April 2025 and a social worker dedicated to Private Fostering who appointed in November 2021 remains in post.

- 3.3. All children who are privately fostered will have a Private Fostering assessment completed and will be reviewed annually for the duration of the arrangement.
- 3.4. The Private Fostering (Regulating and Monitoring) Panel has continued to meet on an 8-weekly basis (minimum) to consider any new arrangements and review any existing Private Fostering arrangements. This panel also provides further quality assurance to Private Fostering assessments. The Panel is currently chaired by the Service Manager for Fostering. In each case, assessments are reviewed, and recommendations made in relation to areas of ongoing support as necessary.

#### **4. National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005):**

- 4.1. **National Minimum Standard 1.** The Local Authority has a written statement or plan, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.
- 4.2. Private Fostering arrangements within Croydon are set out within the Statement of Purpose which is published on the council's online procedures. This document is made available on the council website [Private fostering | Croydon Council-\(https://www.croydon.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/adoption-and-fostering/private-fostering\)](https://www.croydon.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/adoption-and-fostering/private-fostering)
- 4.3. The Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment is quality assured by the Team Manager of the Post Order Support Team.
- 4.4. **National Minimum Standard 2.** The Local Authority promotes awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification; responds effectively to notifications; and deals with situations where an arrangements comes to their attention, which has not been notified.
- 4.5. The Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005 sets out that anyone involved in making a Private Fostering arrangement (parent, carer or third party) must notify the appropriate local authority of this arrangement. Parents and carers often fail to notify because they are unaware of the requirements and believe that it is a private family arrangement which does not concern anyone else.
- 4.6. During 2024 - 2025 we used a variety of internal and external avenues to raise awareness regarding Private Fostering that has built upon previous years of promoting awareness. This included:
- Creation and advertising of a dedicated web page for Private fostering
  - Developing and delivering Private Fostering workshops for Croydon CSC staff
  - Developing and delivering Private Fostering workshops for Croydon Education staff and Health colleagues
  - Publication of the Private Fostering Statement of Purpose

- Social media campaigns
- Data scoping exercise to identify if there were any children open to Croydon who may be living away from their parents in arrangements which had not been correctly identified as Private Fostering.

**4.7. National Minimum Standard 3.** The Local Authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the Private Fostering arrangements in accordance with regulations.

**4.8.** An assessment of the Private Fostering arrangement is undertaken by the Private Fostering social worker, which is subsequently quality assured by the team manager in Fostering.

**4.9.** All of the Private Fostering arrangements are assessed using the Assessment Framework and therefore include the expectations within the national minimum standards:

- The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child about the proposed/ actual Private Fostering arrangement;
- The child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is appropriate and satisfactory;
- The child's needs arising from his/her religious persuasion; racial origin and cultural and linguistic background are being met;
- The child's education needs;
- The standard of care provided for each privately fostered child;
- The physical and emotional health of children;
- Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS), are completed on all carers; in addition, any member of the household over the age of 18 years old is subjected to a DBS and Local Authority check.
- All mainstream private fostering notifications now trigger immediate health and police checks at the point of notification via MASH.
- Where a Private Foster Carer has not yet had a MASH police check, or where an international student arrangement is in progress and a DBS is pending, the allocated social worker is now required to undertake a PNC check as part of interim safeguarding.
- Clear expectations have been set around the need for a safety plan to be recorded in any situation where checks are outstanding.

**4.10.** The assessment includes the carer's understanding and their motivation in providing support for the child, the purpose and the duration of the arrangement. Assessing suitability includes undertaking risk assessments where potential risks have been identified. Support with encouraging parents and carers to complete a Private Fostering arrangement agreement is also provided. Financial arrangements between the carers and parents and also considered during this assessment. Contact is also included as a responsibility of the private foster carer.

- 4.11. National Minimum standards 4-5-6** The Local Authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers, as appears to the authority to be needed.

The Local Authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.

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.

- 4.12.** Private foster carers are provided with information and advice regarding children's developmental needs. The Private Fostering Social Worker assists and advises all private foster carers with general parenting skills and provides advice/support on an ongoing basis.
- 4.13.** In the vast majority of cases, the parents with parental responsibility are seen by the social worker or if they are not within the UK they are spoken to within the assessment to establish the agreed arrangement. When arrangements involve children from overseas, discussions are generally held over the telephone, or if possible, via MS Teams.
- 4.14.** Children and Young People's views and wishes are incorporated into the assessment report and direct work with them is a part of the ongoing assessment. Children are also seen at school on occasion to provide a different context to the Private Fostering environment to discuss their needs, wishes and feelings.
- 4.15.** An age-appropriate leaflet is provided to children who are subject to Private Fostering arrangements. This is given to all children who are privately fostered, and the Private Fostering Social Worker will advocate on their behalf, if necessary, on issues such as legal status, placement, contact and education.
- 4.16. National Minimum Standard 7:** The Local Authority has in place and implements effectively a system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering. It improves practice where this is indicated as necessary by the monitoring system.
- 4.17.** Each Private Fostering arrangement is assessed using the Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Record and this is signed off by a team manager or service manager.
- 4.18.** The number of Private Fostering cases and compliance with statutory functions is monitored through the 8 weekly Private Fostering panels (Regulating and Monitoring Meetings). In addition to compliance with Private Fostering regulations i.e. initial visit within a week of notification, the meetings ensure that all children are progressing well and thriving in relation to their expected outcomes.

- 4.19.** Annual reviews and reviews undertaken where there is a change in circumstances are completed by the Private Fostering social worker. They are quality assured and presented at the Private Fostering panel. Private Fostering arrangements are agreed by the panel and signed off by the Fostering Service Manager. This is followed up in writing by a letter confirming the arrangement.

## **5. Summary of Progress since April 2024**

### **Embedding Ofsted's 2020 Recommendations**

- 5.1.** Following Ofsted's visit to Croydon in 2020, all recommendations relating to Private Fostering have been considered and addressed, despite wider challenges across the council, including changes in leadership and financial pressures.

**5.2. Key improvements include:**

- The continued operation of the Private Fostering Panel, chaired by the Head of Children Looked After (delegated to the Fostering Service Manager). The panel meets at least every eight weeks and reviews all Private Fostering arrangements.
- A clear statement of purpose is in place, setting out the council's responsibilities and expectations around Private Fostering.
- All Private Fostering arrangements are now reviewed regularly through the panel process, with an emphasis on children's lived experiences and improving the quality of oversight.
- A designated Private Fostering social worker continues to support the service and ensure timely visits.

**5.3. Response to the Most Recent Ofsted Inspection - October 2024:**

- 5.4.** In the most recent Ofsted inspection (October 2024), inspectors acknowledged that "support provided to children who are privately fostered is appropriate." However, they raised concerns in one instance where a delay in Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks was not accompanied by a stand-alone safety plan or police checks, which limited immediate assurance of the child's safety.
- 5.5.** It is important to note that this related to a single arrangement involving an international student. The DBS check had been completed and was pending return. The arrangement was being monitored and considered within supervision, but there was no specific safety plan recorded on the case notes, nor had a Police National Computer (PNC) check been completed at that point. Once the assessment was completed, the DBS results had been received and were logged on the child's record.

## **5.6. Actions taken since the inspection:**

- All mainstream private fostering notifications now trigger immediate health and police checks at the point of notification via MASH.
- Where a Private Foster Carer has not yet had a MASH police check, or where an international student arrangement is in progress and a DBS is pending, the allocated social worker is now required to undertake a PNC check as part of interim safeguarding.
- Clear expectations have been set around the need for a safety plan to be recorded in any situation where checks are outstanding.

**5.7.** These changes have been implemented to ensure that there is no gap in safeguarding assurance while checks are pending and that children's safety remains the priority at every stage of the process.

## **5.8. Other Areas of Improvement**

- There has been continued progress in raising awareness and improving identification of Private Fostering arrangements across the partnership. Key developments include:
- Ongoing delivery of Private Fostering workshops and training sessions to internal Children's Social Care staff, health professionals, and education colleagues.
- PF awareness days and "taster" sessions held within team and service meetings across the council.
- Targeted training within MASH, which has supported both social workers and managers in better understanding Private Fostering and strengthened their ability to identify arrangements at the point of referral.
- Improved mechanisms for case consultations and access to advice.
- A dedicated and monitored Private Fostering mailbox has been established to support timely responses to queries and promote consistent communication.
- These developments have helped build professional confidence and improve the quality and timeliness of notifications received, particularly at the front door.

## **6. Performance Data:**

### **6.1. Number of Notifications from April 2024 - March 2025**

**6.2.** While the number of notifications to the local authority over the last 5 years have been unpredictable, they appear to be moving in the right direction. During the reporting period 2024-2025, a total of 49 new Private Fostering referrals were



received. This represents an increase of 14 referrals compared to the previous year (2023/2024), when 35 referrals were recorded. This is a 40% increase year-on-year.

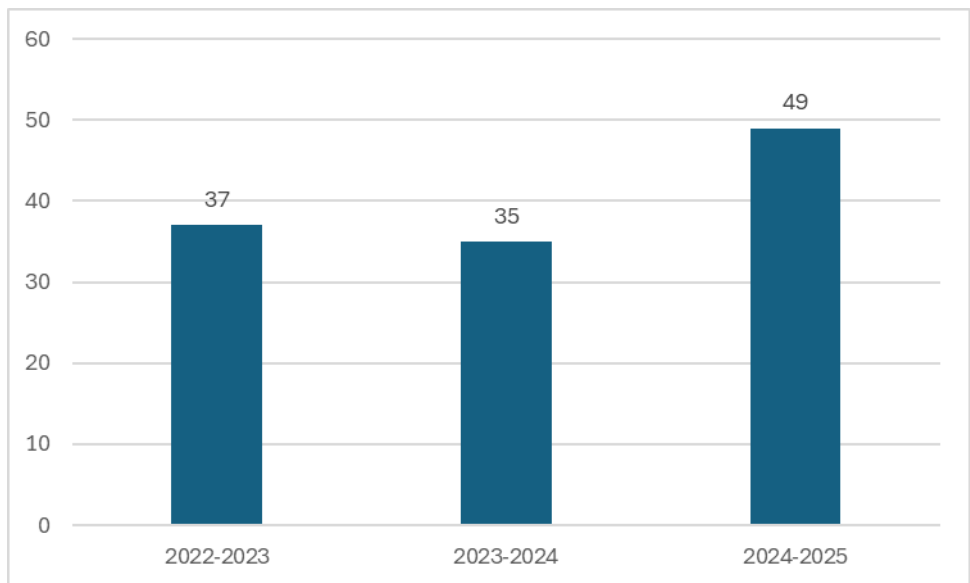


Table 1. Private Fostering Notifications Year-on-Year Trends

- 6.3. Table 1. Private Fostering Notifications Year-on-Year Trends above shows the number of notifications received over three years: 2022/23, 2023/24, and 2024/25. In 2022/23, there were 37 notifications. This dropped slightly to 35 in 2023/24, a small decline of around 5%. In 2024/25, however, the number rose sharply to 49, a 40% increase on the previous year.
- 6.4. Several factors may explain this rise. Increased public awareness through social media, information sessions and dedicated web page. Stronger links between agencies, and improved systems for identifying and reporting private fostering arrangements have all contributed. A growing number of international students living with private carers has also played a role.
- 6.5. This increase highlights the need for careful planning to ensure the private fostering social worker and the wider team supporting this area can keep pace with demand. At present, there is only one dedicated private fostering social worker. To manage the increased workload, the team manager has been training and upskilling another social worker in the Family and Friends, Post Order Support team, to provide additional support. However, following recent staff reductions within the team, this support may not always be available, which could place additional pressure.
- 6.6. Regular monitoring will be important to determine whether this is a short-term spike or the beginning of a longer-term trend.
- 6.7. Out of the 49 notifications, 40 were international students and 9 were mainstream arrangements. Like previous years in Croydon the majority of the

Private fostering notifications received continue to be in relation to international students.

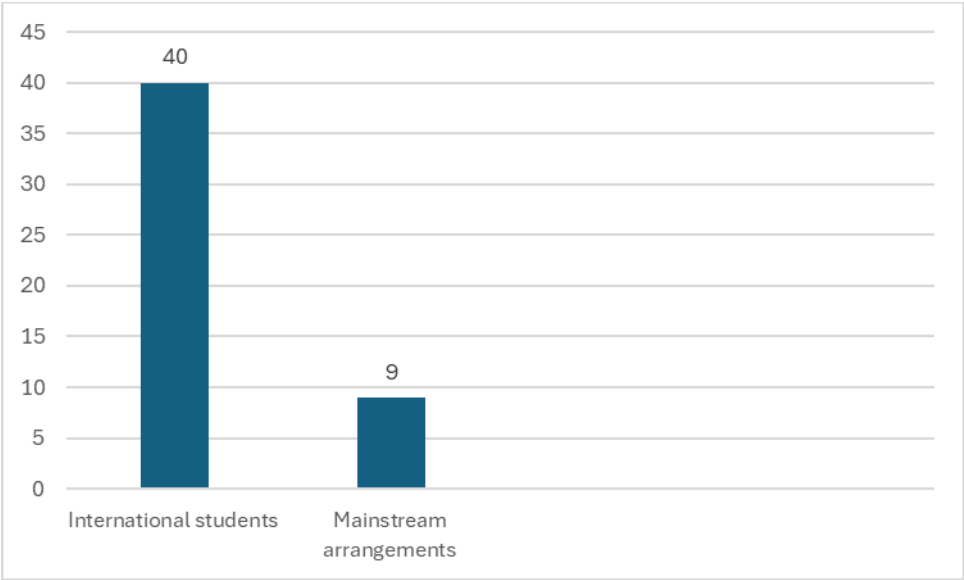


Table 2. Distribution of Private Fostering Notifications

- 6.8.** While international student arrangements continue to account for the majority of private fostering notifications, there has also been a small but steady increase in mainstream private fostering arrangements. In 2022/23, there were 4 such arrangements, rising to 6 in 2023/24 which was a 50% increase. This upward trend continued in 2024/25, with 9 arrangements recorded, representing a further 33.3% increase from the previous year.
- 6.9.** Although the overall numbers remain relatively low, the consistent year-on-year growth suggests a gradual rise in mainstream private fostering. This highlights the need to ensure that awareness, training, and identification efforts continue to address all types of private fostering arrangements.

**6.10. Referral Sources of the 49 Notifications that were received in 2024/ 2025**

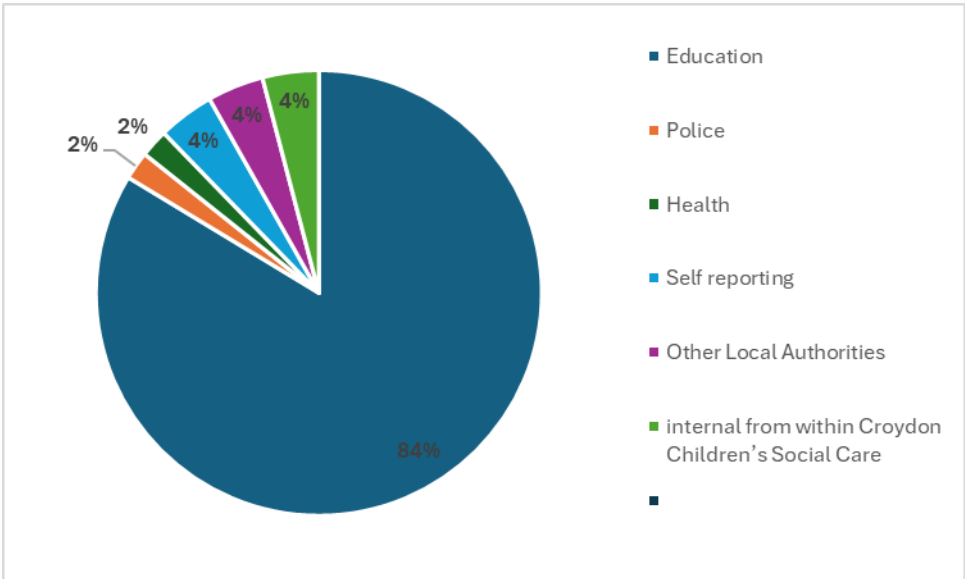


Table 3. Sources of Private Fostering Notifications

- 6.11.** In the reporting period, 2024/25, there were 49 private fostering notifications. Of these, 41 (84%) were received from education. The remaining referrals were distributed as follows: 2 from other Local Authorities, 2 internal referrals from within Croydon Children's Social Care, 1 from Health, 1 from the Police, and 2 self-reported by private foster carers.
- 6.12.** Out of the 41 education notifications, 40 were related to international students, with only 1 concerning a mainstream private fostering arrangement. This continues the established trend of education being the primary source of notifications, particularly in relation to international student placements.
- 6.13.** Compared to 2023/24, where 35 notifications were received, 29 from education, 4 from other Local Authorities, and 2 internal referrals, the overall number has increased significantly. Education referrals have risen from 29 to 41, and notably, this year saw 2 self-referrals from private foster carers, following none the previous year. This suggests a positive impact from ongoing awareness-raising work in the community.
- 6.14.** The number of internal referrals remained consistent (2 in both years), indicating continued engagement from within Croydon's social care teams. However, notifications from other professionals particularly Health, Police, and voluntary sector agencies remain low. Additionally, while there was one education referral related to a mainstream arrangement in 2024/25, this highlights the continued need to ensure schools are equipped to recognise and report all types of private fostering, not only those involving international students.
- 6.15.** Targeted efforts to improve awareness across a broader range of agencies and frontline services will remain a priority, particularly to increase the identification and reporting of mainstream private fostering arrangements.

**6.16. Initial Visits completed within seven days**

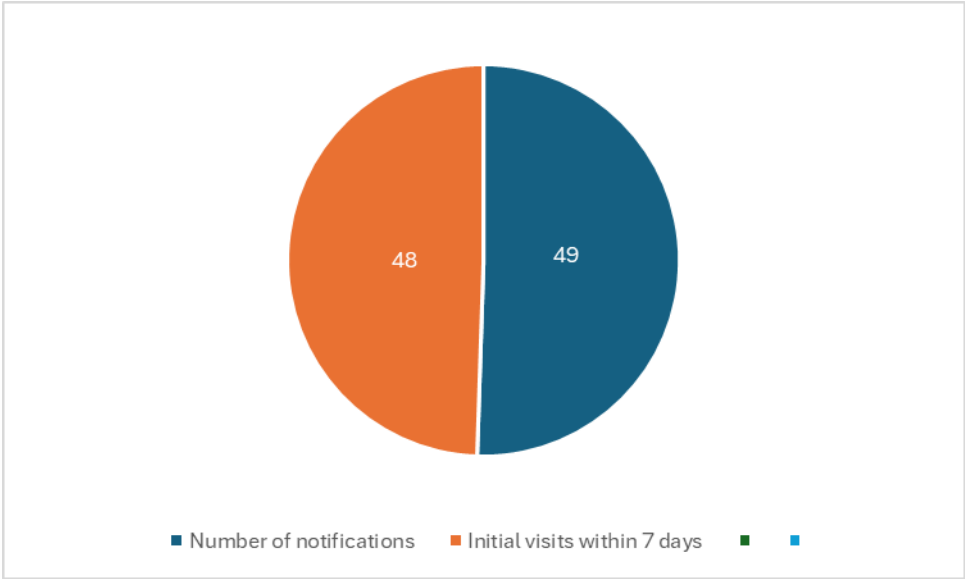


Table 4. Initial Visits Completed

- 6.17.** During the reporting period 2024/25, all initial visits for appropriately identified private fostering arrangements were completed within the statutory timescale of seven working days from the point of notification.
- 6.18.** While table 4 indicates one visit was not completed, this notification was subsequently found not to meet the criteria for private fostering. The young person involved was 16 years old at the time of notification, did not have a disability, and had since moved to another local authority. As such, the arrangement was not pursued under private fostering regulations.
- 6.19.** This maintains the positive performance from 2023/24, when all initial visits were also completed within the required timeframe.

**6.20. Reason for Private Fostering arrangements**

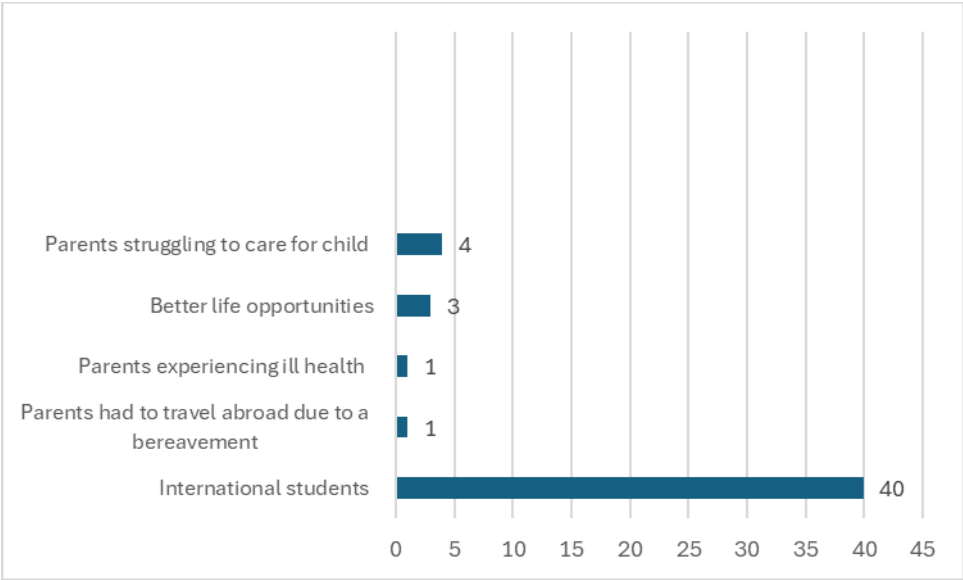


Table 5 - Reasons for Private Fostering Arrangements

- 6.21.** The chart above illustrates the reasons why children were placed in new Private Fostering arrangements. In 2024/25, the majority of private fostering arrangements continued to involve international students, accounting for 40 out of 49 notifications.
- 6.22.** By comparison, in 2023/24, 29 arrangements were related to international students. Other reasons included: following a parental death or ill health, better life opportunities, parents struggling to care for the child, and one arrangement where the child was living with a parent’s ex-partner.
- 6.23.** This year-on-year comparison shows that while international student arrangements remain dominant, there has been a notable increase in mainstream private fostering arrangements, particularly those linked to parental capacity issues and families seeking improved living conditions or support. These shifts highlight the importance of ongoing assessment and tailored support for both international and mainstream Private Fostering scenarios, as well as the need for wider community awareness to help identify and respond to a broader range of family circumstances.
- 6.24.** There has been a steady increase in mainstream private fostering arrangements over the past three years, rising from 4 in 2022/23 to 9 in 2024/25. While the overall numbers remain low, the gradual increase suggests improved recognition and identification of these arrangements. Mainstream arrangements are often more complex than those involving international students and tend to arise from situations such as parental ill health, bereavement, or family breakdown. These arrangements typically require more involvement from social workers and can raise additional safeguarding concerns.

- 6.25.** This year, the team has also worked with a number of children with immigration-related issues. Some children living in private fostering arrangements have uncertain immigration status, which can affect their stability and access to appropriate services. In other situations, no one with parental responsibility was able to confirm that they had agreed to the arrangement. There have also been circumstances where the child had arranged to live with a carer without the parent’s knowledge or consent. In line with statutory guidance, our position is that these should not be classified as private fostering arrangements, as the legal definition under the Children Act 1989 requires that the arrangement is made by a person with parental responsibility.
- 6.26.** These developments highlight the importance of clear assessment at the point of notification to determine whether an arrangement meets the criteria for private fostering. They also reinforce the need for continued partnership work with immigration services and legal to ensure that children in these circumstances are supported and safeguarded appropriately.

**6.27. The ages when the Private Fostering assessment/ arrangement**

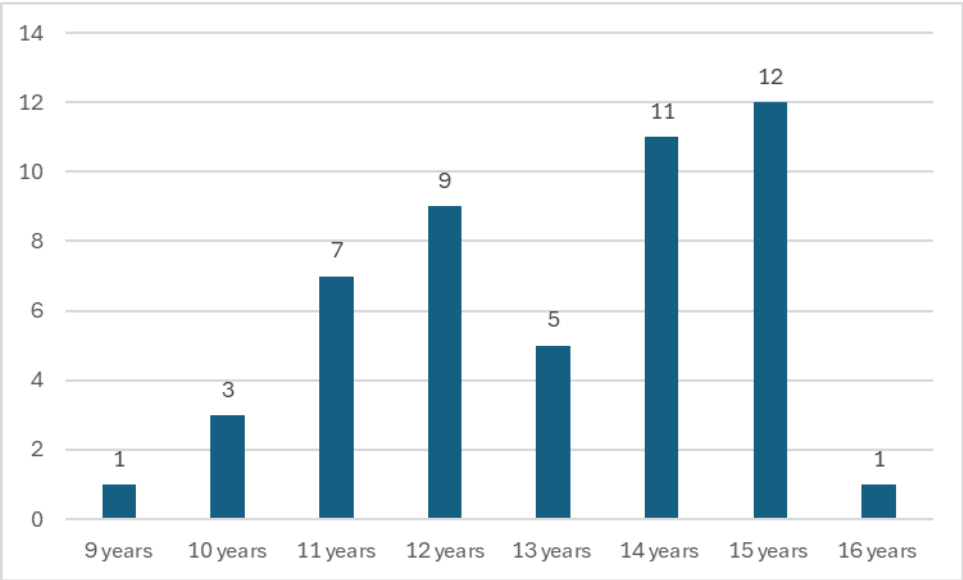


Table 6. Ages of Children in Private Fostering Arrangements.

- 6.28.** The majority of private fostering notifications in 2024/25 were for older children. The highest number of notifications was for children in the 14-15 age range. This pattern is broadly consistent with previous years and continues to reflect the large number of referrals received from language schools, which typically involve international students aged 13 -16.
- 6.29.** There has been some progress in increasing notifications for younger children, though numbers remain comparatively low. Of the 49 notifications this year, 11 children (22%) were aged 11 or under. This is a slight decrease from the previous year, where 37% of notifications were for children under 13. The drop may reflect changes in referral patterns, but it also highlights the ongoing need for targeted awareness-raising among professionals who work with younger age groups.

6.30. Work to address this has continued, however, further efforts are needed to ensure that professionals across education, health, and community services are confident in identifying and reporting private fostering arrangements involving younger children.

6.31. Race and Cultural Considerations

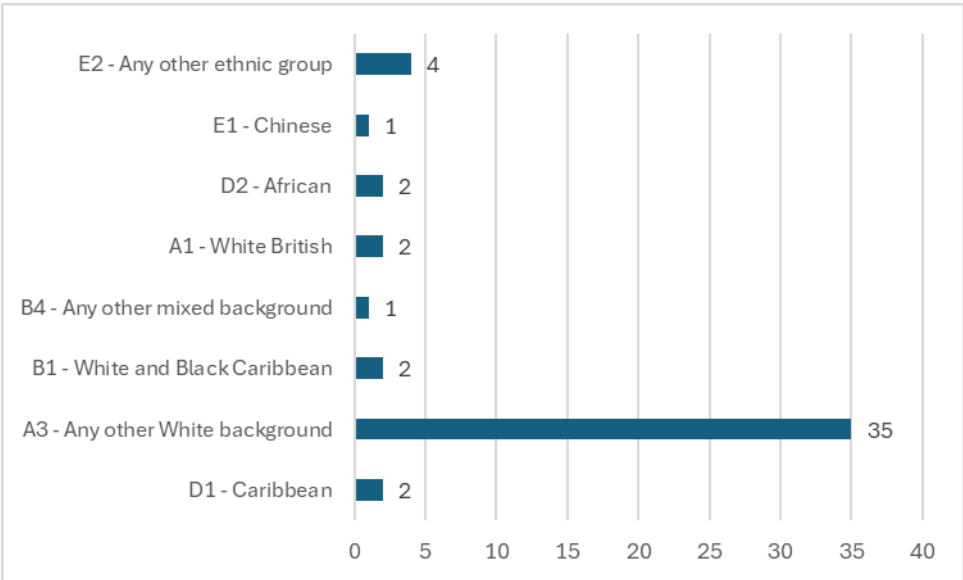


Table 7 - Ethnicity of Children in Private Fostering Arrangements

6.32. The above table shows that most private fostering arrangements in 2024/25 involve children from “Any Other White Background,” which aligns with the ongoing high number of international students in Croydon. This trend has been consistent over recent years.

6.33. There is also an increase in notifications involving children from a wider range of ethnic backgrounds, including African, Caribbean, Chinese, and mixed heritage groups. This shows that private fostering affects a diverse group of children within the local community, not just international students. It also points to the need for awareness raising across all communities, as some groups may be less likely to report private fostering arrangements.

7. **Summary and Areas of Development**

7.1. The reporting year 2024 - 2025 has seen notable progress in Croydon’s Private Fostering work. The service has built on the foundations laid by previous Ofsted recommendations and responded swiftly to findings from the most recent inspection in October 2024. Improvements in safeguarding practices, staff training, and inter-agency collaboration are contributing to a more robust system of support for privately fostered children.

7.2. The significant year-on-year rise in notifications, particularly those related to international students, highlights the effectiveness of awareness-raising initiatives, especially within education settings. However, the data also points to

persistent gaps in recognition from other key partners, and to the increasing complexity of mainstream private fostering cases.

### **7.3. Key Achievements:**

- Sustained operation of the Private Fostering Panel, strengthening oversight and quality assurance.
- All initial visits completed within statutory timescales.
- Targeted training and awareness sessions delivered across the partnership.
- Introduction of mandatory PNC checks and safety planning for cases with incomplete vetting.
- A dedicated email inbox and improved consultation processes to support timely decision-making.
- An increase in self-referrals and mainstream notifications, suggesting better community engagement.

### **7.4. Ongoing Challenges:**

- Low notifications from health, police, and voluntary sector partners in identifying private fostering arrangements.
- Increasing caseload pressure on the single dedicated Private Fostering social worker, with limited backup capacity due to wider staffing reductions.
- Complexity in mainstream cases, including safeguarding risks, immigration issues, and arrangements lacking parental consent.
- Underrepresentation of younger children in notifications, despite known vulnerability.

### **7.5. Priorities for 2025 - 2026:**

- Strengthen multi-agency identification and continue to deliver targeted briefings and learning sessions for health professionals, police, and community organisations to increase recognition of private fostering arrangements beyond schools.
- Expand training reach by embedding private fostering awareness into induction programmes and routine CPD for frontline practitioners across the partnership.
- Develop multi-agency protocols with MASH, legal, and immigration partners to clarify roles, thresholds, and responses for complex or ambiguous arrangements.



- Improve data capture and analysis so we can monitor and respond to trends (e.g., child age, ethnic background, referral source) to support targeted outreach.
- Increase engagement with families and promote public understanding of private fostering and the importance of notifying the local authority.

**Khalil Campbell - Service Manager (Fostering)**  
**Shaeiysha Suraweera-Aratchige, Team Manager Private Fostering**  
**July 2025**