

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

**Inspection report
Fostering services**

Independent Foster Care Services

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Dates of this inspection episode:	26,27,28 March and 1 st April 2008
Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	
Date of previous report publication:	19 July 2006
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Introduction

This report has been compiled following an inspection of the fostering service undertaken by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 and associated regulations.

The primary focus of the report is to comment on the quality of life and quality of care experienced by service users (foster carers and children in placement).

The report contains information on how we inspect and what we find. This inspection focuses specifically on the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 but also takes into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The report is divided into nine sections reflecting the broad areas covered by the inspection:

1. Summary of findings
2. Policies and procedures / information
3. Management and staffing of the service, (including premises and finance)
4. Provision of foster carers (including fostering panel)
5. Quality of care and safety for children placed
6. Placement of children, parts v & vi of the regulations
7. Records
8. Short term placements
9. Family and friends as carers

CSSIW inspectors are authorised to enter and inspect fostering services at any time. Inspection enables CSSIW to satisfy itself that the service should continue to operate, and for IFAs this will include satisfaction that continued registration is justified. It also ensures that all fostering services are compliant with:

- Care Standards Act 2000 and The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, whilst taking into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.
- The service's own statement of purpose.

At each inspection episode there are visits to the service during which CSSIW may adopt a range of different methods in its attempt to capture service user's and their relatives'/representatives' experiences. Such methods may for example include self-assessment, discussion groups, case tracking, visits to carer's homes, observation, interviews, and the use of questionnaires. At any other time throughout the year visits may also be made to the service to investigate complaints and to respond to any changes in the service.

Readers must be aware that a report is intended to reflect the findings of the inspector at a specific period in time. Readers should not conclude that the circumstances of the service will be the same at all times.

The registered / responsible person/s is/are responsible for ensuring that the fostering service operates in a way which complies with the service specific regulations. CSSIW will comment in the general text of the inspection report on their compliance. For those regulations which CSSIW believes to be key in bringing about change in the particular service, they will be separately and clearly identified in the requirement section.

As well as listing these key requirements from the current inspection, requirements made by CSSIW since the last inspection, which have been met and those which remain outstanding are included in this report. The reader should note that requirements made in last year's report which are not listed as outstanding have been appropriately complied with.

Where key requirements have been identified, the provider is required under regulation 42B, (Compliance Notification), to advise, in writing, the appropriate regional office of the completion of any action required by CSSIW.

The regulated service is also responsible for having in place a clear, effective and fair complaints procedure which promotes local resolution between the parties in a swift and satisfactory manner, wherever possible. The annual inspection report will include a summary of the numbers of complaints dealt with locally and their outcome.

CSSIW may also be involved in the investigation of a complaint. Where this is the case CSSIW makes publicly available a summary of that complaint. CSSIW will also include within the annual inspection report a summary of any matters it has been involved in together with any action taken by CSSIW.

Should you have concerns about anything arising from the Inspector's findings, you may discuss these with CSSIW or with the registered person.

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales is required to make reports on regulated services available to the public. The report is a public document and will be available on the CSSIW web site, www.cssiw.org.uk

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Section one: Summary of findings

This was the third annual inspection of IFCS (Independent Foster Care Services) since its registration in 2004.

The service was seen to be operating in a manner consistent with its Statement of Purpose document, which was both clear and comprehensive. The information made available to children and young people was comprehensive and designed with an evident intention to promote their rights.

The agency's policies and procedures indicated that managers had a very good understanding of the regulatory framework and conveyed an approach that was child centred and thorough.

Staff and carers all appeared to be operating to clearly understood and consistent models of professional and child care practice.

The resourcing of the service was robust in support of the agency's stated aim for 'best practice' and all staff spoken with conveyed a commitment to the agency along with their commitment to children.

The Responsible Individual and Registered Manager of the agency both conveyed an eager commitment to the continuing development of the service and its compliance with regulations and national minimum standards.

The processes involved with the recruitment, supervision and support of foster carers were seen to be thorough and all carers spoken with, said that they had received excellent support from the agency in promoting good outcomes for children.

The premises were brand new, well appointed and provided well for their purpose.

Whilst the panel was not visited as part of this inspection, it was confirmed that they had fulfilled their respective roles including the reviewing processes and monitoring of the quality of assessments.

It was clear that the agency was intent on ensuring that children would receive a quality of care that was professional but allowed them to feel a sense of value and belonging within the families with whom they were placed.

Complaints were clearly seen to have been used as a positive means of problem solving and a commendable level of transparency was evident.

There was a commitment conveyed to utilise the format of the various agreements that are required by Parts 5 and 6 of the regulations to improve planning for children placed with the agency.

Record keeping was seen to be thorough and meeting regulatory requirements.

It is urged that the framework provided by Regulation 42 for reviewing the quality of care

provided by the agency, be developed further by the agency to support their continuous improvement within a systematic, evidential and transparent process which provides for consultation and feedback with children and other stakeholders.

The Inspector however was only pleased with the commitment conveyed by all who contributed to this inspection and would wish to commend their efforts in the valuable work they undertake.

Section two: Policies and procedures / information

Inspector's findings:

Part 1: Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide

The statement of purpose document in place met regulatory requirements, setting out clearly the aims, objectives and resourcing of the service. The document was available in English and Welsh languages and in paper format and electronically. It was comprehensive and included a range of useful information about the agency and the service it provided in addition to that required by Regulation 3(1).

Young people were provided with an information pack when placed with the agency that contained all of the information required by Reg 3(3) 'the Children's Guide'.

The pack was comprehensive and included not just the contact details for the agency, the CSSIW and the Office of the Children's Commissioner but stamped addressed envelopes for them, should the young person wish to complain or raise concerns.

The actual document in the pack, titled Young Person's Guide, did not include information about how the young person could secure access to an independent advocate, though this information was included elsewhere in the pack. It was recommended that this be included in the guide.

The pack came in a lockable storage box for the young person along with a camera, diary and some other useful items.

It was the view of the inspector and of carers and professionals consulted as part of this inspection, that the service was conducted in a manner entirely consistent with their statement of purpose.

The document was accurate at the time of this inspection but was going to be revised to include details of the agency's intention to expand.

Requirements made at the last inspection had been undertaken.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
To include in the young persons guide, information on how young people can secure access to independent advocacy.	NMS 1.5

Section three: Management and staffing of the services, (including premises and finance)

Inspector's findings:

Management and Staffing of the Service

Part 1

The registered provider of the service had been vetted and approved by the CSSIW as being suitable to do so in accordance with Regulation 5

It was evident that the registered provider maintained a close and active involvement with the service, and demonstrated a passion and commitment to achieve good outcomes for young people placed with the agency.

He also conveyed a good understanding of the regulatory framework in respect of fostering services, along with an up to date familiarity with other associated regulations and guidance on measures to strengthen arrangements for the placement, health, education and well being of looked after children and young people. (Towards a Stable Life and Brighter Future – June 2007).

The Inspector recommended that all of the staff of the agency should become familiar with the revised regulations and guidance of 'Stable Life and Brighter Futures' to assist them in advocating for the rights of the children they accommodate and to make best use of the IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) and the statutory reviewing processes.

The registered manager of the agency had been vetted and approved by the CSSIW as being suitable to do so, in accordance with Regulation 7.

The manager had appropriate professional qualifications and experience and was at the time of this inspection, undertaking an appropriate management qualification.

The manager was seen to exercise effective support, leadership and management of the service and its staffing.

Part 2

It was confirmed by the manager that all employees of the agency had job descriptions that outlined their responsibilities in compliance with Regulation 21.

It was also confirmed that the financial accounts of the agency had recently been audited by qualified accountants to confirm their continuing viability.

The agency had various systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the service provided but had not completed a report to satisfy the requirements of Regulation 42 (review of quality of care). This report is intended to monitor all the matters set out in Schedule 7 of the regulations and to provide for consultation with children placed, their parents (where appropriate) carers, placing authorities and persons working for the

agency. The report is also intended to assist in reviewing and improving the quality of care given to children placed by the agency and be made available to stake holders on request.

Discussion took place about the way this report could be constructed and about the way that consultation could be undertaken to inform its contents and to contribute to the agency's commitment to continuous improvement.

It was acknowledged that this work needed to be completed and that a report should be provided to the CSSIW within 3 to 6 months of this inspection. It is intended that when this report is completed, that it be made available on request to those who had contributed to its compilation.

Part 3

The inspector was satisfied that the service was appropriately staffed with qualified social workers and suitably experienced support workers. There were clear systems in place for workload allocation, with stated and manageable limits to enable staff to fulfil their roles effectively.

Staff who did not have social work qualifications were undertaking NVQ qualifications appropriate to their roles.

At the time of this inspection, there were plans being implemented for the expansion of the service and this included a revised management structure, additional social work and support staff.

It was confirmed that staff disciplinary procedures met the requirements of Regulation 21(2) in providing for the suspension of staff where necessary. It also made clear, that failure on their behalf to report an incident of abuse or suspected abuse, would be grounds upon which disciplinary proceedings could be instigated.

The manager advised that social workers and support workers received supervision at an appropriate frequency and that their performance was subject to appraisal, initially after 6 months and then annually.

Records of staff supervision and appraisal were not checked during this inspection.

Part 4

The premises of the service were seen to be entirely suitable for their purpose, providing office space with appropriate security for storing records and accommodating social work and support staff. There was a family / contact room, conference and training / meeting room. The premises provided appropriately for disabled access.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number
A report be produced in accordance with this regulation and provided to the CSSIW	15/06/08	42 (2) (a)

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section four: Provision of foster carers (including panel)

Inspector`s findings:

Provision of Foster Carers

Part 1

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training carers

All carers had received weekly visits from their supervising worker and carers spoken with, confirmed that they felt very well supported by the agency. Their comments included; they are always available day or night; they are always eager to answer any queries or just to talk things over; and, nothing is too much trouble. The agency had consulted with carers just prior to this inspection to seek their views on the frequency of their visits to them, as some had suggested that this level of visiting was not necessary in all cases, i.e. when carers were experienced and had long term stable placements.

Carers confirmed that the procedures manual provided by the agency, gave them access to a wide range of information in respect of their roles.

It was confirmed that carers had received training as part of their initial assessment / approval in the form of the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster Course'.

Carers spoke positively about their experience of the assessment and training provided and of attending the fostering panel.

Carers confirmed that child protection training had been provided and that they were required to attend refresher training as considered necessary by their supervising worker. They also confirmed that they would be supported if the need arose, for them to attend any specific training they identified in relation to the needs of a particular child or young person.

The assessment process employed by the agency used BAAF (British Association of Adoption and Fostering) 'Form F', which covered the requirements of Regulation 27, Schedule 3 in assessing the suitability of carers.

It was confirmed that carers' approval status was clarified in their files, with agreements that in accordance with Regulation 28.5 (B), included the statement,

'To care for the child placed with them as if the child were a member of their family and to promote the child's welfare, having regard to the long and short-term plans for the child' (Schedule 5 (ii) Agreement).

It was checked that the record of carers' reviews had included consultation with children, the carers themselves and placing authorities, as required by Regulation 29 (1-6).

No carers' approval status had been terminated by the agency since the last inspection.

Part 2

Fostering Panels

The agency had established a fostering panel in accordance with Regulation 24.

It was confirmed that the panel was made up of individuals that satisfied the respective requirements of this regulation and that panel meetings had only taken place when quorate.

It was also confirmed that the panel had monitored the effectiveness of reviews and oversaw the conduct of assessments. Their comments on these matters were seen to be included in the minutes of their meetings.

The fostering panel had been attended on previous occasions as part of the inspection process. It was not attended during this one.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section five: Quality of care and safety for children placed

Inspector`s findings:

Within the scope of this inspection, the inspector was satisfied that the welfare of children had been actively promoted by the agency and that the welfare of the child remained paramount in the design and implementation of all of its policies, procedures and operating systems.

It was clear that children and the understanding of and fulfilment of their needs, was at the core of the agency's business.

It was confirmed that the child protection policy in place met the requirements of Regulation 12 and that carers and staff spoken with, understood their respective responsibilities in protecting children from abuse and / or exploitation.

It was confirmed that the behaviour management policy complied with Regulation 13 and that carers understood the need to promote acceptable measures of control and to find out the best ways to achieve that with individual children.

The policy in respect of children who might be absent without authority met requirements and carers spoken with, confirmed their understanding of their responsibilities when children were absent. It was confirmed that unauthorised absences had been notified to children's placing authorities and to the CSSIW.

A system was in place to monitor the educational attainment, progress and school attendance of the children. This information was gathered during the supervision of carers. It was pleasing that at the time of this inspection, that all of the children placed with the agency were attending education or agreed alternative programmes.

It was also pleasing that the agency had established an agreement with an alternative education provider, to provide for children placed with them that had not been attending school.

Carers spoken with informed the inspector that they had actively promoted the rights of children placed with them when on occasions; schools had not supported them effectively. Some carers were also providing transport to and from children's schools to avoid them having to move schools.

The agency's complaints procedure met the requirements of Regulation 18, other than not including the name, address and telephone number of the CSSIW (Reg 18 (6) (a) of the revised regulations (Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children Act 1989 (Regulatory Reform and Complaints) (Wales) Regulations 2006).

It was also recommended that the term 'local resolution' be included in relation to Stage 1 of the existing complaints procedure.

When the contact details of the CSSIW are included in the policy, it is requested that the policy be submitted to the CSSIW for its approval.

The agency had clearly promoted the use of complaint procedures and the resolution of issued raised at the earliest stage. It had also made arrangements for advocacy to be accessed by children who required support in making complaints.

It is advised that the existing policy be audited by the agency to check compliance with all aspects of the 2006 regulations and that for instance, the policy could make clear how advocacy could be made available. It was also advised that statement be made in the policy and in the summarised version of the policy in the young person’s guide, to clarify children’s rights to use the complaint procedures of the fostering agency, those of their placing authority and the National Assembly for Wales (CССИW); and how they might choose who to complain to.

It was clear that the agency and its carers wanted to promote the health of children placed with them. It was concerning however that some difficulties had been encountered in co-ordinating services via CAMHS (children and adolescent mental health services) when for instance children were presenting self harming threats or behaviours. The agency had commissioned a service to access a family therapist who could offer advice but access to the CAMHS services had on several occasions proved problematic, typically due to delays in getting appointments.

This is of no criticism of the fostering agency but is stated as a concern voiced by them.

The inspector heard various examples of how the agency had supported children in having contact with their family members and also of how carers had understood the considerable and sometimes unsettling significance for the children in seeing their family members.

The agency had provided training for all of their carers about family contact, in recognition of its significance for the children and in relation to their caring for them effectively.

Notification of significant events had been made to relevant agencies as required by Regulation 43

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number
<p>That the name, address and telephone number of the CSSIW be included in the complaint policy / procedures.</p> <p>To submit the revised complaint procedure to the CSSIW when completed.</p>	15/06/08	<p>18 (6) (a)</p> <p>18 (9)</p>

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
<p>That statements be included in the complaint procedure and the summarised version for children, that makes clear their rights to use the complaint procedures of the fostering agency, those of their placing authority and their right to contact the office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and/or the CSSIW; and how they might choose who to complain to.</p> <p>It was recommended that these documents make clear how independent advocacy could be made available.</p>	

Section six: Placement of children parts v & vi of the regulations

N.B. Use of this section of the report will apply primarily to inspections of local authority fostering services and the duties and responsibilities covered in Parts 5 and 6 of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 only. It may need to be used for inspections of independent agencies where a local authority delegates certain duties to them under Regulation 40.

Inspector`s findings:

Delegation agreements were in place from each of the placing authorities that commissioned with the agency.

The agreements were seen to be comprehensive and the responsible individual for the agency conveyed his recognition of the importance of clarity between the placing authority and the agency of their respective roles and responsibilities in caring for young people.

Indeed, the responsible individual would be happy to expand the range of responsibilities that could be fulfilled by the agency in the interest of improving the co-ordination and delivery of the arrangements that are made for children`s care, education, health and general well being.

The agreements in place however, did not meet the requirements of Regulation 40. The responsible individual confirmed their understanding that new agreements were being developed by local authorities to satisfy this regulation and that they would be provided as soon as they were finalised.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number
To have in place a delegation agreement from each placing authority that meets requirements	15/06/08	40 (1)

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section seven: Records

Inspector`s findings:

It was confirmed that considerable effort had been made to ensure that carers were provided with sufficient and up to date information about the children they cared for.

It was also confirmed that improvements have been made in this area and that referral information in particular had improved.

Some frustration however was conveyed by managers of the agency and by carers that whilst they do what they can to understand the histories of the children they care for, that information provided by case responsible workers was often inadequate.

One carer gave an example of not knowing particularly critical information about a child's family and of the young child sharing this information with them.

The inspector was advised of children who could not go on school trips because the process of providing consent had not been confirmed.

The inspector was also advised that whilst some case managing social workers were very good at information sharing, that some were not and that efforts to find out more were not always welcomed.

The inspector would emphasise his support of the efforts made by the agency to ensure that carers have appropriate consents and the information they need and advise that amongst other means, that the statutory review process and the IRO (independent reviewing officer) be used to support this aim.

It was confirmed that individual 'foster placement agreements' were in place and that their structure complied with the requirements of Regulation 34(3) Schedule 6.

Records were in place in respect of complaints as required.

Records were in place in respect of foster carers approved by the agency and separately for those who were not approved or had withdrawn their application. Records in respect of allegations or suspicions of abuse or neglect in respect of children placed were in place both in a dedicated record and in individual files as necessary.

Records were kept of the educational attainment, progress and attendance of children and also in respect of other notable achievements of the children. Minutes were checked in respect of the meetings of the fostering panel in compliance with Regulation 25.

The relevant certificates of insurance were in place as necessary and appropriate arrangements were in place for the secure storage of all records.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section eight: Short term placements

Inspector`s findings:
Only one carer of the agency provided short breaks (weekends).

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section nine: Family and friends as carers

Inspector`s findings:

As an IFA, the agency had no involvement in the placement of children with family and friends as carers. (Regulations 38).

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source