

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

**Inspection report
Fostering services**

Independent Foster Care Services

Solva House
Spring Meadow Business Park
Wentloog Road
Rumney
CF3 2ES

Date of publication – 7th February 2011

You may reproduce this Report in its entirety. You may not reproduce it in part or in any abridged form and may only quote from it with the consent in writing of the National Assembly for Wales.

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Mid & South Wales
 4-5 Charnwood Court
 Heol Billingsley
 Parc Nantgarw
 Nantgarw
 CF15 7QZ

01443 848527/28/29
 01443 848526

Name of fostering service:	Independent Foster Care Services
Address of service:	Solva House, Spring Meadow Business Park, Wentloog, Rumney, Cardiff, CF3 2ES
Contact telephone number:	02920 837320
Registered provider:	Independent Foster Care Services
Responsible Individual	Adrian Wilson
Manager:	Gail Tobin
Dates of this inspection episode:	23 and 24 November 2010
Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	
Date of previous report publication:	
Inspected by:	Neil Caddy
Other regions contributing to this report:	

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 carers' 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

Contents

Section	Page
Introduction	2
Section one: Summary of findings	5
Section two: Policies and procedures / information	7
Section four: Provision of foster carers (including panel)	10
Section five: Quality of care and safety for children placed	12
Section six: Placement of children parts v & vi of the regulations.....	14
Section seven: Records	15
Section eight: Short term placements	17
Section nine: Family and friends as carers	18

Section one: Summary of findings

IFCS (Independent Foster Care Services) has been registered as an independent fostering agency since 2004

The agency has been managed by the same manager since that time. The registered provider of the service maintains an active role in monitoring the delivery of the service and in planning for its future.

The operation of the service is underpinned by a comprehensive framework of policy and procedural documentation to support consistent and child centred practices.

Management and staffing levels have increased in advance of any planned increases in the numbers of foster carers provided. Staff recruitment, retention and development have all been strengths of the service and the collective body of expertise would effectively support the aim of the service to meet best practice standards.

Continuing progress has been made in relation to placement matching and decision making and a dedicated placement team has been established to continue to develop the expertise necessary in this area.

Development has taken place in relation to record keeping and the collating of information to better understand and improve the delivery of the service. Good progress has been made in the systems to monitor, review and evaluate the quality of care provided in compliance with Regulation 42.

Foster carers received robust support but were also monitored closely to promote the delivery of good outcomes for children. The focus on safeguarding children and in transparency in information sharing further supports this aim.

The level of regulatory compliance was good.

Methodology included;

- review of the self assessment document completed by the agency
- policy and procedural documentation reviewed
- consultation took place with managers and staff of the agency
- the records of consultation of the views of children and carers were checked
- records relating to placement decision making and matching were checked
- foster placement and foster care agreements
- panel meeting minutes
- questionnaires to foster carers, staff and placing authorities

In overall summary, IFCS remains a relatively small and well managed fostering agency, providing a range of well supported placements to children in the South Wales area. The

management of the service has maintained its aim and commitment to provide a service that reflects good practice or best practice standards and its systems to support continuous improvement have been well developed.

Section two: Policies and procedures / information

Inspector's findings:

The statement of purpose document provided a comprehensive range of information in respect of the operation and resourcing of the service to enable informed decision making about making placements with the agency.

Equally comprehensive information was made available to young people with a clear emphasis on empowering their rights.

A comprehensive procedures manual was in place bringing together the necessary policies and procedures of the agency which had been provided to all staff and foster carers.

Managers agreed to revise the existing policy on education to make clearer the arrangements to monitor the children's educational attainment, progress and attendance at school.

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
That the policy in respect of education is revised to make clearer, the arrangements for monitoring the educational attainment, progress and school attendance of children placed with the agency.	28/02/11	16 (2) (a)

Good practice recommendations:

NMS or other source

--	--

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

Inspector's findings:

The manager and provider of this service had appropriate qualifications and experience to fulfil their roles effectively and confirmed that they had undertaken any training necessary to maintain their expertise.

Staffing and management levels had been increased year on year in line with the planned and measured growth of the agency since its registration in 2004. Limits were in place for the numbers of foster carers that the social workers were required to assess or to supervise, to maintain good practice standards. Similarly, management structures had been strengthened to support and monitor the effective delivery of the fostering service.

It was confirmed that all staff had appropriate qualifications and experience, detailed job descriptions and that they had received the necessary support and supervision to fulfil their roles.

Managers confirmed that the performance of all staff had been subject to annual appraisal and staff spoken with said they had received excellent support from managers.

Managers had introduced a new data base to assist in monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 of the regulations to inform the continuing improvement of foster care provided. A review had been conducted which included consultation with children, foster carers and other stakeholders as required. The report of the review undertaken drew conclusions to its findings and identified some areas for further development.

The premises of the agency provided well with offices and meeting rooms to fulfil their purposes. The financial accounts were audited in 2009 confirming the financial viability of the agency.

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 four: Provision of foster carers (including panel)

Inspector's findings:

IFCS had 69 approved foster carers at the time of this inspection, providing up to 138 placements which were all in Wales. 106 children were in placement and 24 assessments were being undertaken of prospective new foster carers. The agency did not place children under the age of five with carers who smoked and from 2011, will not approve any carers that smoke.

The agency had supported some carers in undertaking NVQ qualifications and their training schedule showed all carers to have received what the agency had designated as 'core training'. Foster carer support group meetings had been held four times in the year preceding this inspection. The frequency of the visits made by supervising Social Workers to foster carers reflected a robust approach to monitoring the quality of care provided and to supporting them in providing care to meet the particular needs of the children.

The records of foster carers' reviews showed evidence of consultation with the young people (depending on age); with the responsible / placing authorities and with the foster carers and their children.

Records received in advance of the inspection showed that there had been a small amount of delay in undertaking some foster carers' reviews though they had all been undertaken by the time of the inspection. The constitution of the agency's foster care panel had been previously checked to confirm compliance with regulatory requirements. Panel had been attended previously to observe proceedings.

The panel had received training and guidance appropriate to their roles as well as the agency's procedures manual and the relevant regulations.

Discussion took place about the minutes of panel meetings which showed that all recommendations made by them had been made 'unanimously'.

It was explained that the chair of the panel preferred to achieve unanimous recommendations. The inspector would urge that any dissent or differing views of members would be reflected in the minutes of panel meetings. It was also felt that the reasons for panel recommendations should be recorded specifically in the minutes to meet regulatory requirements. It was further suggested that the minutes make clear the role panel members are fulfilling on the panel and not as stated in some instances, their full time work roles.

Records confirmed that panel had terminated the approval of carers where necessary.

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:

The agency had revised its risk management strategy since the previous inspection. Detailed written risk assessments had been put in place for each individual child which were reviewed every two weeks as a minimum and updated when necessary.

The agency had raised safeguarding concerns in respect of some children in placement with the majority of concerns in relation to when they were in the care of their birth families or as a result of risk taking behaviour. A small number of concerns had been raised in respect of foster carers and these had been responded to appropriately by the agency.

Managers confirmed that they had liaised with the safeguarding agencies in each of the local authorities where their foster carers lived to confirm that their referral criteria and procedures were compatible.

Foster carers were required to keep records in relation to a range of matters including accidents, illnesses, injuries, complaints, allegations, unauthorised absences, medication and measures of control or sanctions. This information was returned to the agency on a two weekly basis and was entered onto a data base to be collated. This information was used to identify any patterns or trends that required action to be taken and to inform the report on the review of the quality of care provided.

The system developed for monitoring the quality of care provided was comprehensive and reflected transparency. It reflected a commitment to the continuous improvement of the service and to safeguarding children. The analysis and conclusions set out in the report of the review undertaken were in some areas very informative but did not comment on all of the areas in Schedule 7. Managers were pleased with the system they had established for this purpose and looked forward to its continuing development. The Inspectorate acknowledges the progress that has been made in this area.

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 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:

Any necessary agreements were in place.

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:

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section seven: Records**Inspector's findings:**

Responsible local authorities are required to enter into an agreement under Regulation 34(3) (the foster placement agreement) which is to be provided to foster carers before a placement is made and includes the information set out in Schedule 6.

Managers advised that they had endeavoured to obtain any relevant information about children before they are placed to ensure they are matched with foster carers who can understand and meet their needs.

Records checked showed evidence of an 'initial matching assessment' which identified placement needs and associated risks. The document did not set out the measures to minimise risk but these were dealt with in a separate risk assessment process.

The summary of the record of one matching meeting checked stated that the carer was aware of the information provided and that they agreed to proceed with the placement. It was felt that the decisions reached to confirm the compatibility between child and carer should have been recorded more explicitly.

The agency had however provided clear information to the foster carer including the child's family structure and the support they would provide to the child and to the carer. The section to clarify the responsibilities of the placing / local authority including the agreed frequency of visiting the child had not been completed.

The agency had identified difficulties in obtaining the information they needed to support effective matching and placement making. They had made considerable efforts to overcome these difficulties and had produced their own forms to collate the necessary information. The inspectorate would wish to acknowledge their efforts in this area and to urge that they continue their efforts to ensure that placement decision making is informed by adequate information. It is also urged that the records held by the agency to demonstrate effective matching provide more detailed evidence in this regard.

Foster care agreements were in place as required setting out the terms of approval of foster carers and their obligations to care for children placed with them.

Registers were in place for all staff and carers employed by or for the purposes of the agency and of all children placed by them. A register was also held of carers that had been assessed but not approved. Records were in place for foster carers and in respect of the children.

Records were in place for complaints, allegations, and notifications and in relation to the meetings of the fostering panel.

Appropriate storage and security arrangements were in place.

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:

The agency had approved two carers to provide 'respite / short break' placements. They confirmed that these carers had been approved, supported and monitored as other carers.

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:

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section nine: Family and friends as carers**Inspector's findings:**

N/A

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:

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source