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 – 07 April 2012

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Mid & South Wales
Government Buildings
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Name of fostering service:	Independent Foster Care Services
Address of service:	Solva House, Spring Meadow Business Park, Wentloog Road, Rumney, 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:	8th and 9th March 2012
Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	
Date of previous report publication:	
Inspected by:	Neil Caddy
Other regions contributing to this report:	

Introduction

IFCS is an IFA (Independent Fostering Agency) which has been registered with CSSIW since 2004. The registered provider is Adrian Wilson and the registered manager is Gail Tobin.

It has offices in Cardiff and Swansea and provides foster care placements in the South Wales area to South Wales Local Authorities.

It has 96 approved foster carers able to provide placements for up to 220 children.

135 children were in placement at the time of this inspection.

Summary of inspection findings:

What does the fostering service do well?

- The policies, procedures and practices employed by IFCS reflect the need to protect and promote the welfare of children
- Managers demonstrate transparency in the provision of their services and are willing where necessary to advocate for children and to represent their rights
- Managers are responsive to change and the continuing development of the services they provide
- They acknowledge the need to provide placements for children that can meet their needs and are sustainable
- Managers recognise that legislation and the framework of regulations supports their continuing improvement and ability to provide placements to children that support their positive personal development
- Appropriate investment is made in the management and resourcing of the service to support its aim to provide a good quality service to children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

- Quality assurance processes including consultation with children and stakeholders have improved in particular but the commitment from managers to the continuing evaluation and improvement of its service provides assurance of its underpinning commitment to providing positive support to children.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

a.) priorities

No regulatory requirements have been made as a result of this inspection.

b.) other areas for improvement

The agency has developed a service improvement plan that recognises the need for improvement in;

- the information it provides to children to inform them of their rights and entitlements as well as their responsibilities
- its ability to understand and provide evidence of how well its service supports and enables positive outcomes for children
- its systems to obtain and take into account the views of responsible local authorities about the quality of care provided by its carers when reviewing their continuing approval
- for the minutes of the proceedings of fostering panel to confirm quoracy, the reasons for its recommendations and the role fulfilled by panel members

Inspection methods

The following methodology was employed and informs the findings of this report;

- review of the agency's self assessment
- review of the agency's report on the quality of care provided
- review of some policy and procedural documentation
- consultation with children, foster carers, responsible local authorities and IFCS staff
- discussion / interview with IFCS staff, managers and the responsible individual
- checking of records relating to children, staff, foster carers and the fostering panel.

Section one: Policies and procedures / information

Inspector`s findings:
The statement of purpose provides a comprehensive range of information about the operation and resourcing of the service and complies with requirements. Managers advised of plans to introduce key operational and 'smart' objectives to the document to assist in monitoring the overall effectiveness of the service as part of its quality assurance process.

The young persons' guide is also comprehensive and provides the information required including how to make a complaint and access independent advocacy. Managers have plans to further develop the welcome packs they provide to young people to be more specific for children of different ages.

The policy and procedural framework that underpins the operation of the service is comprehensive, readily accessible to foster carers and staff and reflects the principle of the welfare of children as paramount.

A requirement was made at the previous inspection to further develop the policy in respect of monitoring the educational attendance, progress and attainment of children. This has 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**

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

Inspector`s findings:
The manager and provider of the service are appropriately qualified and experienced and have undertaken training necessary to maintain their professional knowledge and expertise.

The staffing level of the service has grown proactively and incrementally to support its year on year growth and to fulfil its aim of providing robust support to its foster carers and the children they care for. Staff said that managers are accessible, provide clear leadership and direction and are supportive of them in fulfilling their work roles. It was confirmed that all staff receive regular professional supervision and appraisal and that personal development plans were being introduced to support their continuing professional development. The agency provides placements to students undertaking Social Work qualifications which they recognise as also supporting the learning and development of existing staff and the agency as a whole.

The agency employs a family therapist whose primary role is to provide guidance to foster carers in understanding the needs and behaviours of children and to support its aim for the continuing improvement of placement stability. They are also able to undertake direct therapy where required.

Staff retention is very good and the agency has been successful in recruiting staff and managers of suitable calibre to support their continuing development. There had been no delays in the fulfilment of foster carer assessment, support or reviewing activities.

The premises at both the Cardiff and Swansea offices provide appropriately for their purposes for staff and managers, the meeting of the fostering panel, foster care training and family contact. Appropriate security arrangements are in place in respect of the premises and for record keeping. The premises at Cardiff are also used to provide 'youth club type' facilities for children placed with IFCS carers.

Particular progress has been made in the development of the systems employed by the agency to monitor, review and improve the quality of care provided to children placed with its carers. The systems have included consultation with children, foster carers, staff and responsible local authorities to inform the review, its conclusions and its subsequent service improvement plan. Plans are in place for the continuing development of this process with an increasing emphasis on evaluating data, the findings of consultation and to better reflect the outcomes of children. The report of the review is available upon request from IFCS in accordance with regulations.

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

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Requirements which remain outstanding:

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New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations: **NMS or other source**

Section three: Provision of foster carers (including panel information)

Inspector`s findings:
The agency has 96 approved foster carers, able to provide placements for up to 220 children. 135 children were in placement at the time of this inspection. All children placed were English speaking and placed in the South Wales area on behalf of South Wales' Local Authorities. The new branch of the agency in Swansea supports 15 approved foster carers and 26 children were in placement. These are included in the overall numbers stated above.

All foster carer assessments and reviews had been undertaken within appropriate timescales and the necessary reports generally included the required information, scrutiny and analysis. In some instances, the agency had been unable to obtain and take into account the views of responsible local authorities when reviewing the continuing approval of foster carers which had raised concern for both the agency and its panel. Plans were in place to address this issue and are considered necessary by the inspector. Records checked in respect of the proceedings of the fostering panel did not state the reasons for its recommendations, the role being fulfilled on the panel by its members or whether meetings had been quorate. The inspector was assured that meetings had only taken place when quorate and that the reasons for recommendations and the individual roles of panel members will be included in future minutes.

Consultation indicated that foster carers are very well supported by IFCS but also that they recognise their accountability to provide good quality care to children in support of their positive personal development. The agency had increased its investment in training for foster carers to emphasise the need for placement stability for children. Its monitoring indicated that significant improvement had been made in this area as well as in the retention and development of its foster carers.

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

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Requirements which remain outstanding:

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New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section four: Quality of care and safety for children placed

Inspector`s findings:
There is considerable evidence to indicate that the service is conducted in a way that actively promotes the welfare of children.

All staff and foster carers had received training in safe caring and in the agency's safeguarding procedures. The agency has demonstrated ongoing efficiency in identifying and reporting any such concerns though felt that not all concerns raised in respect of children had been dealt with adequately on their behalf by safeguarding agencies. They had plans to review practices in this area to establish if improvement could be made. Records were checked to ensure that where safeguarding concerns had arisen, that the agency had fulfilled its responsibilities appropriately in safeguarding children, providing support to foster carers and in contributing to any child protection enquiries and investigations.

As referred to in Section Two of this report, the agency has developed systems for monitoring the quality of care provided to children. The results of consultation with children indicates that they are very largely satisfied that their foster carers;

- make them feel part of their family
- make them feel safe
- make them feel wanted
- give them praise
- discipline them in a fair way
- listen to their worries and concerns
- help them with problems
- help them to make complaints

They gave them an overall rating of 9.4 out of ten for the support and care they provide.

The review states that all children in placement are attending a school placement and where necessary, that they are receiving a range of targeted support to fulfil their personal education plans. Many examples of good practice were seen of IFCS promoting the education of children in placement and also of its financial investment in this area.

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

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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: 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:
It was confirmed that IFCS were not fulfilling any duties or responsibilities on behalf of local authorities and therefore that no delegation agreements were required.

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

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Requirements which remain outstanding:

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New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations: **NMS or other source**

Section six: Records

Inspector`s findings:
Records were in place as necessary in respect of children, foster carers, staff, and the fostering panel, complaints and safeguarding concerns.

Emphasis was made during the inspection about the need for the agency to obtain adequate information from responsible local authorities to inform placement making and matching considerations. They have established a dedicated placements team for this purpose which provided evidence of how these responsibilities are fulfilled, including referral, risk assessment and matching documentation. There was a clear understanding of the need to place children responsibly and its correlation with placement stability for children. Their monitoring showed significant improvement had been made in this area.

Notwithstanding the work undertaken by the agency to ensure that children are only placed with carers who can meet their needs, they acknowledge the need for continued vigilance to ensure that they comply with the requirements of regulations in respect of Foster Care Agreements and that Foster Placement Agreements are provided by responsible local authorities.

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

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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 seven: Short term placements

Inspector`s findings:
Not applicable, IFCS do not approve foster carers solely to provide short term breaks for children.

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: Family and friends as carers

Inspector`s findings:
This is only applicable to local authority fostering services.

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**

A note on CSSIW's inspection and report process:

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. The report is divided into nine sections reflecting the broad areas covered by the inspection.

This inspection focuses specifically on the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 but also takes into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

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:

- The 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.

Fostering services are inspected annually by CSSIW 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 CSSIW of the completion of any action that they have been required to take in order to remedy a breach of the regulations.

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. This report is a public document and will be available on the CSSIW website: www.cssiw.org.uk