

# Wellcare Fostering Services Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

WellCare Fostering Services was registered as an independent fostering agency in October 2004. The company has a number of directors. The agency's aim is to recruit, supervise and support foster carers in meeting the needs of looked after children by local authorities. At the time of this inspection the organisation's office is situated in the Gants Hill area of the London borough of Redbridge. However, it is relocating to the Mill Hill area of the London borough of Barnet at the end of December 2007. The agency has eight approved foster carers and five young people placed in three families. The London Boroughs of Thurrock, Barking and Haringey have placed young people with the agency.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this announced inspection is to assess Wellcare Fostering Service Ltd against all the key standards and to gauge improvement made to the service since the last inspection that was conducted 11 months ago. Overall Wellcare Fostering Services Ltd is judged overall to be an inadequate service - notice to improve. The recruitment and vetting procedures, monitoring and reviewing of documents needs to be consistent. The main areas of concern relate to outcome areas 'Staying Safe' and 'Organisation and relate to gaps in documentation and gaps or inconsistencies in the implementation of employment, supervision and reviewing procedures' in practice. The actions outstanding at this inspection relate to the recruitment procedures which have not been followed consistently by the fostering agency. Evidence that approval letters have been sent to approved foster carers, that matters listed under Schedule 7 have been consistently managed by the registered person or that staff employed had been supported with regular supervision are lacking. Approved foster carers' reviews were not undertaken in the time, specified in Regulation 29. Appointed panel members do not have job descriptions. The service has sound policies and written guidance that are known to foster carers, the placing authorities and staff employed. Children and young people are consulted with and contact between children and young people is good. There is a commitment to provide well matched placements for looked after children and young people. The foster panel function is effective and close attention is made to ensuring equality and diversity practice is addressed through each strand of the service being provided.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last inspection 18 actions and 22 recommendations were made of which eight actions have been complied with. The Registered Fostering Manager is now registered. All young people have appropriate facilities for sleeping. Young people's healthcare information is shared with foster carers. Consent and treatment forms from the placing authority are signed and on file. Assessment of foster carer's suitability is sufficient in detail. Foster carers no longer wishing to foster are presented to the panel and records of foster carers' information is recorded on file in a clear and concise way. Prior to the inspection questionnaires were sent to foster carers, young people who use the service, social workers and teachers. The feedback from the questionnaires was very positive about the service provided and this was reiterated by the foster carers and foster children and young people when visiting.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering service ensures that no placement is made which prevents a young person from continuing to receive the specialist health care services they need. Links with Children's Advisory Mental Health Service (CAMHS) are made when needed. Prior to a placement the foster carer is provided with as full description as possible of the health needs of the young person and clear procedures governing consent for the young person to receive medical treatment are in place. Foster carers understand their roles and responsibilities with regards to supporting young people with their overall healthcare needs. Foster carers are given clear information on what they must record by the agency. However, case notes are not consistently maintained or monitored as gaps in recording appointments and behavioural changes were identified. The Foster Carers handbook is clear and has a section relating to 'Health Care and Development'. However, this does not cover support and guidance on medication, homely remedies and first aid. Foster carers understand their roles and responsibilities well by promoting good health and welfare. Core mandatory training offered by the fostering service focussed on health care issue. Young people interviewed in placement confirm that they are encouraged and supported by their foster carers to live healthy lifestyles. Where necessary, the services of specialist health care professionals are sought.

## Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The management systems in place for addressing allegations and complaints have not been monitored and reviewed appropriately by the fostering agency. Notification regarding the serious complaint investigated had not been submitted to Ofsted. The fostering service has a good child protection policy that clearly outlines what actions are to be taken by the foster carer. Children and young people know who they can talk to if they are unsure about anything which makes them feel uncomfortable. The fostering agency, the placing authority and the foster carers work in partnership to ensure that the young person is fully safeguarded. Foster carers have undertaken training in child protection, safe caring and managing challenging behaviour as a part of the induction package. However, it is not clear what additional support is given to foster carers if a young person's care becomes challenging or how these incidents are supported by the agency. The Registered Manager stated that there are resources for additional training when needed. The fostering service ensures that foster carers' immediate family clearly understand the boundaries of caring for a looked after child or young person. If a behaviour issue occurs within the household and the boundaries of discipline/roles of family members are challenged, it is clear these incidents are to be reported as soon as possible, however, practice in this area is not consistent. Complaints against a foster carer are also addressed appropriately through the right channel and the Fostering Manager liaises with the placing social worker on this. There is a clear recruitment and selection procedure in place for appointing staff which outlines good practice in safeguarding children and young people. This has not been followed by the fostering agency. Inspection of the records identified a number of gaps with regards to Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, references and verification of qualifications. It is not clear, from the number of freelance social workers applications on file, as to the numbers of staff employed. The fostering panel is organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers. There are clear written procedures on the function of the panel and how the decision making process is managed. The panel have access to a medical, health and education advisor and one of the

panel members was previously a foster carer. The suitability vetting of foster panel members including CRBs, references and relevant qualifications is not consistently completed by the agency. Evidence showed that CRBs have been recently sought by the fostering agency, although a majority of the panel members have been in post at least one year. Since the last inspection only one panel meeting, in December 2007, has been held. Annual reviews of approved foster carers were outstanding at this time. The chair advised that these be proposed for review in January 08. There is no evidence that panel members have undertaken any relevant training for the purpose of their roles. The fostering service ensures foster carers can comfortably accommodate young people who are cared for in a warm, cosy environment that they can call home. Young people have their own rooms and beds and sibling groups of the same sex may share a room. Prior to becoming a foster carer, health and safety checks are undertaken by the agency to assess that the home is suitable to accommodate children and young people. However, follow-up checks completed do not address any of the outstanding areas highlighted from the previous assessments, such as, ensuring fire safety equipment is in place and window restrictors fitted. The fostering agency obtain as much information as possible on any referral made. Matching procedures consider the child and young person's ethnicity, sexuality, religious and linguistic background as part of their assessment of a placement. Children and young people receive care from a culturally diverse range of foster carers. The fostering service ensures training with regards to cultural understanding is part of the induction, and on-going training foster carers attend. Young people benefit from placements which assist them in developing a positive understanding of their heritage. Foster carers' profiles highlight their cultural backgrounds, experiences and strengths. The Registered Fostering Manager and Responsible Individual are suitable to run the fostering service.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensures that children and young people and their families are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promotes equality. The foster carers are all from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and young people are matched with them appropriately. The Directors and staff of the fostering service are aware of the importance of these matters. Foster carers have undertaken training in equality and diversity and rate recent training on cultural competence as informative and good. Issues of equality and diversity are explored with prospective carers throughout the assessment process and thereafter following foster carers approval at panel. The importance of continuity of education and promoting educational achievement is given priority. Foster carers continue to be supported in being helped to meet the young person's educational needs. Of the foster carers visited, it is clear that appropriate facilities are in place to support a young person to do homework so as to attain their potential. Foster carers are proud to share the young person's overall achievements since being placed with them. The fostering service provides short term breaks for children and young people in foster care. The short break system makes use of an existing pool of carers solely approved for the purpose of respite or foster carers who may not have had a placement since being approved. Feedback from foster carers who undertake respite care was very positive and they felt very supported by the Fostering Manager who provided additional support when needed. However, there is no short term break policy or procedures in place as to how this is clearly implemented in practice.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering service makes sure that each child and young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in their care plan. The views of children and young people are sought and given weight in determining contact arrangements. Children or young people complete a questionnaire prior to their review, all were found to be positive. However, it is not evident how the fostering service ensures the opinions and views of children and young people, on matters affecting them, can influence or change the service they receive. The fostering agency, foster carers and the placing social worker work in partnership to ensure that the contact arrangements run smoothly, ensuring each party know when and where the contact will take place.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which covers the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with them. Allowance and fees are reviewed annually by the fostering agency.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is inadequate.

The Statement of Purpose sets out what the service provides and how. The Registered Fostering Manager was approved by CSCI in February 07 and is a qualified social worker with experience in children and families. The organisation is run by a group of Directors who all have specific roles within the organisation. It is not clear which of the Directors support the Registered Fostering Manager with supervision and the day to day management of the service. Over the three days of the inspection the Registered Fostering Manager was not fully available to assist the inspector during the inspection and there were no clear systems in place for anyone to deputize in his absence. The impact is that the Registered Manager is not fully supported to cover all the tasks needed for the effective management of the service. A number of gaps within the service are identified. These relate to vetting procedures, clear guidance on management responsibilities with regards to supporting the Fostering Manager in matters of emergency and approved foster carers' annual reviews being reviewed at panel as required under Regulation 29. Also, although the Fostering Manager and the placing authority carried out a child protection issue appropriately, no notification to Ofsted was submitted and the recording and monitoring procedures were incomplete when examined at the time of this inspection. The day to day office management is supported by the Registered Fostering Manager and a part-time administrator. On day one of the inspection a newly appointed part time senior social worker started their employment, this post had been previously covered by the Registered Fostering Manager. Freelance social workers are employed to undertake Form F assessments of new foster carers. Copies of current Form F assessments seen were found to be very comprehensive and clearly written; this was a great improvement from the last inspection where an action was made. Each approved foster carer has supervisory visits; these are not undertaken consistently by the agency, due to a lack of appropriate staffing resources. The Fostering Agency assesses that the recent employment of the senior social worker will address these issues. Records examined did not cover areas, such as, health and safety and insurance details. Foster carers are clear on the support they receive from the agency and feel very supported. They are provided with a good induction and relevant training. Foster carers and staff confirm that support groups are available; foster carers attend to varying degrees. The service is continuing to develop a support group. The fostering service administrative records contain

all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by the Regulations. There are separate record keeping systems for complaints and allegations. However, there were some shortfalls with regards to how the Registered Person ensures required documents, such as, investigation information, foster carers files, annual reviews, staff supervision and appraisal, measure of control and restraint and unauthorised absence from the foster home of a child accommodated there are monitored and reviewed. Case files for children and young people contain relevant information obtained from various sources including statutory LAC information; Care plans and LAC reviews and information obtained from carers themselves.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
12	update the Foster Carers Handbook relating to Healthcare and Development and include a section on medication and recording procedures. Each foster carer must be provided with a written health record for each child placed in their care, and this is updated during the placement and moves with the child. (Regulation 42(1) Schedule 7(9))	29 February 2008
22	ensure that once a placement is made, supervision visits in the first year of the placement are undertaken at least within one week from its beginning and then at intervals of not more than six weeks. Clear evidence of this must be kept on file. (Regulation 35(1)(c)(i)).	31 January 2008
9	provide further training for foster carers in recognising the signs of abuse, managing behaviour and responding appropriately to disclosures and allegations. (Regulation 12)	29 February 2008
9	keep and regularly review information on all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in and responding appropriately to disclosures and allegations. All notifications as stated in Schedule 8 must be submitted to Ofsted as soon as it practicable. (Regulation 43(1) Schedule 8)	31 December 2007
15	ensure that information required in respect of all persons seeking to work for the purposes of the fostering service have all the required checks, as required under Regulation 5, 7, 20 & Schedule 1, this must include all panel members and freelance social workers. (Regulation 5, 7, 20, 42(1) & Schedule 1 & 7)	31 January 2008
31	ensure that policies and procedures meet the particular needs of children receiving short term breaks. (Regulation 37)	31 January 2008
11	show evidence of how children and young people are consulted on matters that affect their day to day lives and their futures	31 January 2008



	and how this feedback is monitored and reviewed by the fostering agency. (Regulation 42(3))	
16	ensure that all staff are supervised appropriately. (This includes the freelance social workers employed). (Regulation 21(4)(a))	29 February 2008
17	submit an action plan to Ofsted clearly stating the roles and responsibilities of the management team, what support is given to the Registered Fostering Manager and by whom and what contingency plan is in place when shortfalls regarding staffing arise. (Regulation 19)	31 January 2008
21	ensure that approval of foster carers is reviewed at intervals of not more than a year. When undertaking the reviews the agency must seek and take into account the views of the foster carers, young people and the placing authority.(Regulation 29(2)(3))	29 February 2008

## Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

## Annex

## Annex A

### National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

#### Being healthy

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

**Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.**

#### Staying safe

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

**Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Enjoying and achieving

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

**Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Making a positive contribution

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

**Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Achieving economic well-being

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

**Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.**

#### Organisation

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

**Annex A**

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

**Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**