

Wellcare Fostering Services Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Karen Malcolm
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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. The office has recently moved to Mill Hill, North London in December 2007. The agency has eight approved foster carers and four children and young people placed in two families. The London boroughs of Thurrock and Haringey have children and young people with the agency.

Summary

The purpose of this announced inspection is to assess Wellcare Fostering Services Ltd against all the key standards and to gauge improvements made to the service since the last inspection that was conducted approximately seven months ago. Overall Wellcare Fostering Services Ltd is judged to be an inadequate service - notice to improve, this is the same judgement identified at the last inspection. There have been some areas of improvement with regards to actions set at the last inspection. However, the main areas of concern relate to the outcome areas of 'Staying Safe' and 'Organisation' as safeguards for children and young people placed were found to be inadequately managed throughout. One action outstanding at this inspection relates to the management structure of the service and how this is managed overall. There is a contingency plan in place with regards to the Director support, however, the staff supporting the Fostering Manager were not clearly defined. There is a commitment to provide well matched placements for looked after children and young people, but how this is managed is not clearly actioned, monitored or reviewed by the agency. The foster panel function has not been used effectively by the agency and close attention is not made to ensure that equality and diversity practice is addressed through each outcome area of the service being provided. The service does have sound policies and written guidance that are known to foster carers, the placing authorities and staff employed, and children and young people are consulted.

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 10 actions were made of which nine actions have been complied with. The Registered Persons were asked to improve on the Foster Carer's Handbook, ensure foster carers' supervision visits are undertaken regularly in the first year and all staff are supervised regularly. Also, the fostering service was to provide foster carers with training related to recognising the signs of abuse and ensure all allegations and information are recorded and any notifications are submitted to Ofsted. In addition to this all persons seeking to work for the purpose of the agency were to have all the required checks in place.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

At the last inspection it was actioned that the Registered Persons update the Foster Carer's Handbook to ensure areas of healthcare, medication and recording procedures are addressed. Foster carers have all been given a copy of the most recent updated version of the Foster Carer's Handbook along with a copy of safe caring. Both documents cover all aspects of caring when fostering. Health care sheets are completed for each child and young person placed. These are

collected at each supervisory visit and maintained at Head Office on file. The health care sheets are a summary of individuals' health care appointments, reviews, treatments or incidents occurring in that month. These sheets were newly introduced by the fostering service in January 2008. Copies seen had brief information recorded. The Foster Carer's Handbook states that diaries are provided by the agency, for each foster child and young person placed, to record all daily observations and events. However, foster carers spoken with said that 'the fostering service did purchase diaries for each child and young person placed last year, but not this year, we had to buy our own'. Diaries were seen on each visit to carers' homes, the information recorded was also found to be brief and on some days nothing was written. The Foster Carer's Handbook has clear guidance on what should be recorded in diaries and foster carers when asked understood their role and responsibilities with regards to recording. Any identified areas of risk were briefly recorded by the foster carer, and were not always consistently explored by the social worker during a supervisory visit, as to how the issue is to be managed, what support may be needed and if supported by the agency how was this actioned, managed and reviewed. Before a placement begins, the foster carer is provided with as full a description as possible of the health needs of a child or young person placed and clear procedures governing consent for the child or young person to receive medical treatment. The role of the foster carer is emphasised as part of the induction. Foster carers ensure once a child or young person is placed they are registered with a GP, health appointments are maintained and healthy diets, personal hygiene and health issues are promoted. Children and young people spoken to said that the foster carers support them in all aspects of their care such as accompanying them to health care reviews and GP appointments. The fostering service ensures that no placement is made which prevents a child or young person from continuing to receive the specialist health care services they may need such as a weekly visit to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Each carer undertakes basic training on health and hygiene issues and first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The Registered Manager is a qualified social worker and has been in post since 2007. Since the last inspection the Registered Individual has resigned, however, he remains as one of the board of the Directors and a new Registered Individual has been appointed. Health and safety assessments are undertaken yearly by the fostering agency as part of the foster carers' annual review assessment. However, when any changes occur to the foster carer's household this is not updated to ensure that the placement and home environment still remains safe. Foster carers are encouraged to promote a normal family environment for the child or young person such as participating in leisure activities. However, no records are in place as to how these activities are risk assessed to ensure that the children and young people are safe at all times. Foster carers homes do provide a safe and nurturing environment. Each child and young person has their own bed and the accommodation arrangement reflects the child and young person's need for privacy. The fostering agency obtains as much information as possible on any referral made. Matching procedures consider the child and young person's ethnicity, sexuality, and religious and linguistic background as part of the assessment of a placement. Children and young people receive care from a culturally diverse range of foster carers. However, where this has not been fully addressed is in how the foster carers are supported with a trans-racial placement and what support is given by the placing authority to meet the children and young people's needs. There has been some input with regards to religious needs but this does not taking into account the impact on the children and young people's overall cultural needs. The

fostering service does include in the initial induction, training on cultural understanding, but this is not followed through thoroughly regarding specific needs. The fostering service has not been managed in ways that safeguard and support children and young people in their care. Support carers, although identified, have not had proper checks undertaken by the fostering service to ensure the children and young people are safe at all times. Since the last inspection one notification has been submitted to Ofsted regarding a child protection issue. A clear process of actions undertaken by the fostering service was recorded on file. The fostering service does not fully ensure that foster carers are aware of the particular vulnerability of looked after children and young people and their susceptibility to bullying. There are no procedures in place to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying and to help foster carers cope with this. The fostering service does have a policy on harassment and bullying, but this is aimed at office staff rather than foster carers. Fostering panels have not been used effectively and efficiently by the fostering service with regards to providing a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process, in particular to monitor and review the work of some assessors; to provide feedback; to identify problems; and to ensure that there is consistency of approach in assessment across the service, that it is fair to all applicants and that it has been completed in a thorough and rigorous way, such as when a foster carer's household situation changes and ensuring relevant information is available to panel members prior to a meeting. Since December the Vice Chair has been undertaking the role of Chair. At the last inspection it was actioned that all persons seeking to work for the purposes of the fostering service have all the required checks and this must include all panel members and all freelance social workers. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks have been completed for all staff alongside all other checks required as part of the recruitment process. However, the qualification certificates for social work staff involved in assessments and approvals of foster carers were found not to be up to date at the time of the inspection.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering service does ensure that children, young people and foster carers are provided with services which value diversity and promote 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 cultural competence. However, there is no clear evidence of how strategies have been put in place to support children and young people who are Muslim and have been placed in a Christian household. There are records of meetings held with children and young people. However, there is no information as to why these were actioned, and how they are to be managed, reviewed and monitored by the agency. Supervisory visits do cover equalities and diversity issues but the information recorded mainly relates to individual dietary needs, when there are a number of cultural needs of individual children and young people that also need addressing. 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 children and 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, children and young people were proud to share their overall achievements since being placed with them. Foster carers complete monthly education sheets; these were found to be brief when relating to a specific issue. The Registered Persons stated that the agency does provide short-term break fostering, but so far no referrals have been received for this kind of service.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships. However, there are no clear procedures in setting out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child or young person in foster care are to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed. The fostering service ensures that all foster carers understand the importance of listening to the views of the children and young people in their care. However, from documentation received it was evidenced that children, young people and foster carers feel supported by the agency. Feedback received by Ofsted was very positive. One response where it was asked is there anything you would like to say was 'Yes, that I am well cared for and I want to say thank you for that.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

There are clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. However, at present none of the children and young people within the service are at the stage where preparation to leave care is needed. Therefore, this standard could not be fully tested at the time of this inspection.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The fostering service has a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the facilities and services that are provided. The organisation is run by a group of Directors who all have specific roles and responsibilities within the organisation. At the last inspection it was actioned that the Registered Persons submit an action plan to Ofsted clearly stating the roles and responsibilities of the management team, and what support is given to the Registered Fostering Manager, who by and what contingency plan is in place when shortfalls arise. An action plan was received, which addressed the Directors' responsibilities and how they are supporting the Fostering Manager. However, there are no clear structures in place as to how the Fostering Manager is supported by the social worker and the administrator who both work part time. This was identified as a shortfall, for instance there is no rota in place with regards to when staff are working. Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named social worker who visits once a month; this role is shared with the Fostering Manager. Records of supervisory visits examined were found to be brief in content and the majority of the visits made were announced. The supervising social worker ensures each carer she or he supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all standards, policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service. Supervision of social workers is now undertaken by the Fostering Manager. Foster carers are appropriately supported with out of hours support, support groups and regular training. All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers, foster children and young people. The system for keeping records with regards to allegations and complaints are maintained securely. However, diaries and other records held by foster carers were found to be inconsistently maintained. Foster carers' training needs with regard to child protection were updated in July 2008. The findings from this inspection are that the outcomes for children and young people are inadequate, and there is generally low service performance which does not fully safeguard the welfare of the

children and young people placed. The fostering panel function for quality assurance has not been used appropriately by the agency. Therefore, at this inspection gaps were identified with regards to ensuring support carers for carers are appropriately checked and children and young people were found to be placed with foster carers outside of their approval agreement. The fostering panel function for quality assurance has not been used appropriately by the agency. In addition to this children and young people's overall cultural needs are not being appropriately actioned, managed and reviewed. The vetting procedures since the last inspection with regards to Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks have now improved. However, checks regarding ensuring all qualified social workers' certificates of registration are up to date have not been consistently maintained. There are several strengths in some of the outcome area being judged as satisfactory which indicates that these areas are sound. There is some understanding and approach to equality and diversity but the delivery needs to be more strategically planned. A number of the actions from the last inspection were addressed, therefore the service has a potential to improve.

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
6	ensure health and safety risk assessments are updated when any changes occur to a foster carer's household arrangements. (Regulation 42(1) Schedule 7)	30 October 2008
8	ensure where trans-racial placement is made appropriate training and support for the foster carer is provided. Evidence of how this is to be met, actioned and monitored is to be clearly recorded on the individual foster child's placement plan. (Regulation 17)	30 October 2008
9	ensure appropriate measures are in place to safeguard children in foster care such as ensuring appropriate checks are undertaken for all support carers, appropriate placements are made and appropriate support is in place for foster carers supporting children or young people who may be a victim of bullying or the bully. (Regulation 12 & 28)	30 October 2008
15	ensure all social workers staff have an appropriate qualification; evidence of this is to be kept on file. (Regulation 21)	30 October 2008
30	ensure that any changes to a foster carer's household are immediately reviewed by the fostering panel to ensure that the placement remains suitable and safe for the children or young people placed, for instance if there is a child protection issue. (Regulation 29 & 12)	30 October 2008

30	ensure that the foster carers' agreements reflect the correct approval of the carer. (Regulation 34(1))	30 October 2008
17	review the staffing levels for the service and ensure there is a clear contingency plan to enable the Fostering Manager to manage appropriately. (Regulation 19)	30 October 2008
24	ensure that supervisory social workers monitor foster carers' practice to ensure they are adhering to the agreement to record relevant details about the foster child daily in the daily logs. (Regulation 35)	30 September 2008

Recommendations

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

- provide foster carers with diaries yearly as part of the agency's agreement . (NMS12)
- have at least one of the supervisory visits, as unannounced. (NMS22)

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.