



## **INSPECTION OF ICON EDUCATION**

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**INSPECTORS: Jacqueline Scotney Lead Inspector**

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**Date: 7<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

**The INSPECTION report falls into the following sections:**

- 1. GENERAL BACKGROUND TO GUARDIANSHIP ORGANISATION**
- 2. SUPPORTING INSPECTOR'S REPORT based on visits to, and interviews with Homestays, School Staff and Students and results of questionnaires sent to Overseas Parents and those Homestays and School Staff not visited and interviewed.**
- 3. LEAD INSPECTOR'S REPORT on Standards based on the Stage Two Assessment Framework**
- 4. FINAL SUMMARY OF JUDGEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**
- 5. CONCLUSION**

**Taylor**  
Education

## **1. General background to Bright World Guardianship Ltd**

ICON Education was founded in 2012. Since then, it has rapidly grown, finding schools and providing guardianship for mainly Chinese students. ICON has offices both in China (Beijing) and the UK (Nottingham), and currently looks after 99 children in boarding and day schools across the United Kingdom. ICON aim to deliver a high quality standard of services to their students, parents and schools. ICON has a host family team, as well as a student liaison team who help support the students during their stay in the UK.

Guardians are all fluent in the student's first language, enabling easy communication with both parents and students. ICON previously completed stage one of the accreditation process in 2016. Since then, there has been a change in general manager.

The stage two accreditation meeting took place at the UK Office, in Nottingham on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017. The Host Family Manager and Assistant Manager were in attendance on behalf of ICON, as well as the AEGIS Supporting and Lead Inspectors. The meeting took approximately 6 hours.

## **2. Supporting Inspector's Report**

### **Visit to Schools**

Personal visits were paid to three schools, telephone calls took place with three further schools and questionnaires were received from the remaining ten schools. This meant that all schools listed as working with ICON were contacted as part of the inspection process.

Those staff who were spoken to either in person or on the phone were universally happy with the service that they received from ICON Education. In some cases the company acts purely as a Guardianship Organisation and in others they also provide an agent recruitment service for the Schools.

The company appoints local guardians who oversee the liaison with the School, the students and the homestay. Some of the Schools are day schools and so students are spending a lot of time with homestays. During the inspection all of the students spoken to were over 16 and therefore not subject to Private Fostering Arrangements.

Although not part of the AEGIS inspection process, several Schools commented on the excellent recruitment work ICON undertook for them and how efficient and well organised this process was.

There seems to be some disparity with the documentation schools receive from the company. Several reported that they have been given a good level of useful documentation from the company and others report that they have no formal document outlining the service that ICON undertake to provide. It seems that where ICON is providing an agent recruitment service as well as guardianship more formal contracts are in place. It is important that all Schools are clear what level of service ICON undertake to commit to and any variations in the level of Guardianship on offer to students at their School is made clear. That said, all Schools were clear how to contact a member of ICON staff and had access to an emergency number. In addition to the office staff, Schools reported excellent relationships with the local guardians. There was one situation where a School had needed a member of ICON staff to assist with a problem on a Sunday afternoon and following a phone call to the emergency number a member of staff had been present at the School within an hour, which needless to say they were extremely impressed with. Furthermore, the member of staff was extremely helpful in assisting them to resolve a potentially difficult situation. Following this event ICON also then contacted the parents to explain what had happened and were fully supportive of the School.

Where ICON has recruited the students they are very good at providing the School with information regarding the student's welfare, social, health or behavioural information. However, this is not always the case with students for whom ICON act solely as a Guardian.

ICON staff are particularly good at keeping Schools up-to-date with information about their students and a large number reported that ICON are in touch with them most weeks which is extremely impressive. When asked how satisfied the Schools were with the level of contact and information from ICON over 80% reported that they were extremely satisfied with the remaining Schools stating they were satisfied, this is a very high percentage.

Contact with the Schools is usually via the local guardians and relationships between them and key School staff are strong. Where it is part of the Guardianship package, ICON will send the local guardians to parents' evenings and they will communicate the outcomes back to parents. Termly reports are routinely sent to ICON and these are then translated where necessary and returned to parents. Any feedback from parents following parents' evenings or reports is also then fed back to the School via ICON. This process works well for all Schools. It is worth noting that some of the homestays, in particular where they were looking after day students, felt a little left out of this process and would like to have been more involved – please see my notes under visits to homestays.

ICON are efficient in noting key School dates and in the cases where they organise transport, their planning is efficient. As several of the students are over 18 they regularly organise their own transport arrangements but these are overseen by the School and ICON. In one School several of the ICON students were going on a visit to America and ICON had been particularly good at attending the parent meetings and assisting the students to obtain the correct visas for the trip.

The local guardians were very good, as were homestay families at liaising with the Schools when there were any health issues with their students and confidentiality was well respected. A couple of the boarding Schools commented that they would have liked some feedback from longer stays with homestay families at half-term and the like just to see how students had been. ICON staff are also pro-active at seeking information from the Schools about any welfare, social and educational issues relating to their students.

ICON are excellent in providing details of the homestay arrangements and in the vast majority of cases these are communicated to Schools and students well in advance. One School did complain that the arrangements had been 'rather last minute' but this appears very much to be the exception rather than the norm. Over 80% of the Schools commented that they were extremely satisfied with the Homestay arrangements put into place via ICON.

The ICON local guardians seem to be regular visitors to the Schools and in the case of the Day Schools many reported that the local guardian was often in the School on a weekly basis behaving much like a parent would do.

Most of the Schools reported that they had a copy of the Safeguarding Policy from ICON but several were not clear who the Designated Safeguarding Lead was. However, they had built good relations with their local guardians and knew exactly how to contact them.

When asked would the Schools recommend the services of ICON education to others there was a unanimous vote of confidence from all of them. Several of the Schools commented on the quick responses they receive from both the ICON office staff and from the local guardians. There was a strong feeling that ICON had really benefitted from meeting the AEGIS accreditation standards and that there had been improvements in their work over the last six months which were seen as entirely positive.

### **Meetings with Students**

I was able to meet with a large group of students from two different day schools to discuss the work of ICON education and I then had a skype call with another group of students at a boarding school. In addition during the initial work of the first supporting inspector two other groups of students were interviewed.

All of the students who were spoken to seemed to be happy with their time in the UK. There was some variety in the amount of contact that different groups seemed to have from staff at ICON but on further probing this was often down to the guardianship package their parents had paid for.

In the vast majority of cases students had very positive relationships with their local guardian and there were several excellent accounts of situations where the local guardian had really gone above and beyond what might be expected of them to assist students. In some cases the local guardian had also arranged special events to celebrate Chinese festivals with groups of students.

All of the students reported that they had been in touch with staff at ICON prior to their arrival in the UK, but there was some discrepancy in the number who had received formal student handbooks before arriving in the UK. Many students had received information from their Schools but it would be good if ICON could ensure that all students had their information in good time.

What wasn't clear is that anyone from ICON had taken the time to go through the content of the student handbook upon arrival in the UK. Given that there was some variety in the levels of English that the students I was in touch with possessed I think this is essential. It might also be worth considering producing a copy in Mandarin / Cantonese of all or part of the handbook.

Whilst students all reported that they knew how to contact staff at ICON and they had telephone and WeChat details for staff, I was concerned that very few knew the name of, let alone how to contact the Designated Safeguarding Officer. Whilst I am sure local guardians would point students in the correct direction with any safeguarding concerns I think this is an area ICON need to address.

Local guardians seem to meet very frequently with students who are at day schools and in most cases termly with those at boarding schools. Students reported feeling well supported and that the ICON staff understood their needs. Whilst most students said they would turn

to their parents or friends if there was a problem I sensed that in all cases they would also not have any difficulty in discussing issues with their local guardian / homestay or a member of the ICON office staff.

As several of the students were over the age of 18 they were organising their own transport. It would be good to check that ICON knew the whereabouts and arrangements for all students at all times as this is a requirement of those on Tier 4 visas that they need to be cognizant of when acting on behalf of the Schools.

Many of the older students felt that the local guardians and homestays were very good at helping them to become more independent as they got older and that they felt they were aware of many of their cultural needs.

Occasionally some students felt that the local guardian could reply to their queries a little faster but on further discussion this was often concerning very minor points and the guardian was nearly always back in touch within 24 hours.

All of the students reported very favourably on homestay arrangements. They all felt safe and well supported when staying with the families. There had not been a great deal of information provided to them in advance about the family prior to their arrival in the UK but it had been explained that if they were not happy with the arrangements they could ask to change families and in one case this had happened and the student was now much more settled.

I think ICON might like to consider providing some more detailed information to students about their homestay arrangements to help them prepare. This is especially true for those who are going to be living with the families full-time.

All of the students were happy with the standard of accommodation on offer to them and whilst there was some difference in the level of accommodation I didn't sense any problems here at all. Unusually all of the students who were interviewed reported being very happy with the catering arrangements and level of choice and variety in the food they were given by the homestays. In some cases older students were allowed to cook and very often they would meet together socially for meals.

All of the students reported having plenty of interaction with their families and many had been invited to family events and on visits etc. As there are communities of students from ICON living in local neighbourhoods they do also seem to support one another. Many of the day students reported that they felt very much part of their host families and they were able to treat their rooms as their own.

There was one area of concern that seemed to come up amongst a group of students and that was relating to leaving luggage and belongings in the UK during holiday periods. Some students had been charged excessively high amounts by homestay families to store suitcases at their houses where others had been free to leave all their belongings out in their room. Whilst some discrepancy will naturally exist between families depending upon

the use and demand for their 'spare' rooms, I did do some further research into this concern.

Apparently ICON have since issued information to homestays to say that their students must be allowed to leave two suitcases during the holiday periods for free but that any additional storage needs can be charged for. This seems to me to be reasonable and we will check this during the office visit.

### **Meetings with Homestays**

I was able to personally visit four homestays as part of my inspection work and we received questionnaire replies back from a further twenty. This was a little disappointing despite reminders being sent as ICON currently work with about 60 homestays.

All of the homestays I spoke with were extremely positive about their work with ICON and there was a good selection of new homestays and those who had worked with ICON for a few years.

All of the homestays reported that they had been asked by ICON to undergo a DBS check upon registration. Several homestays already had DBS checks in place but in the case of all those I spoke to ICON had insisted on doing their own check which is certainly good practice. In addition all family members over the age of 16 had been DBS checked.

From speaking with the ICON office DBS checking has been something they have been working hard on and they have now developed a robust spreadsheet that I provided them with, similar to a School Single Central Record, which they now use to monitor all safer recruitment checks in one place.

References have been asked for from all families although sometimes these have been family friends rather than professional references and this would be an area that ICON may like to tighten up on. It has not been possible until the office visit to check if these references have then been validated.

All of the responses from the homestays indicated that they had received a copy of the ICON safeguarding documents and the vast majority of homestays had received some training from ICON in safeguarding. In several cases the homestays had previous Safeguarding training from their other employment and in a few cases the homestays were working within Children's services.

There seems to be some confusion over what annual update the homestays receive in terms of Safeguarding and this will need to be checked during the office visit. Some of those who were visited said that they had been given an updated policy and talked to about the contents, others did not. This is an area where greater consistency is needed. However, all Homestays were aware of who the Designated Safeguarding Lead was and knew how to contact them with a Safeguarding query or concern. All homestays were also clear about

what to do in the case of a missing student. Whilst some homestays were aware of the role of their Local Safeguarding Children Board, others were not and this is an area ICON should address in their next training to ensure all Homestays know about the contact details for their LSCB and that they can now make a referral themselves if they wish to.

The vast majority of the Homestays had received good details about the students they were providing care for and knew about their background and any health / allergy concerns. However, there did not appear to be a comprehensive written safe care / welfare plan in every case. This point can be checked during the office visit. In addition, not all homestays had been given details about the interests / hobbies of the students they were caring for and so felt a little underprepared.

Most homestays did not have any contact details for the parents of the children they were looking after as all contact was via ICON. This is perfectly acceptable and in view of the language challenges probably most appropriate. Some families though had met their student's parents when they had visited the UK and in all cases this had been a very positive experience.

Comprehensive contacts are in place between the homestays and ICON and all the homestays reported how professional ICON were when it came to business matters and remuneration. Several homestays had worked for other companies and commented that ICON were significantly better and much more professional.

The vast majority of homestays had received a homestay handbook and felt it was very useful. In addition they had been visited either by the local guardian or a member of the ICON office staff and felt well supported prior to accepting students. They were all clear about the accommodation requirements that ICON expected and I was able to see several very well furnished and comfortable rooms during my visits. In every case where a day student was being looked after, they had been able to personalise their rooms which was very good to see. Several of the households were also able to offer private bathroom facilities for the students.

Homestays were very clear about the meal arrangements for students and many discussed enjoying cooking with their students and a few even hosted events for small groups of ICON students at their homes.

Most homestays were not clear that they should not have more than three students at any one time but none reported that they had or indeed would.

Several of the homestays were aware of safe internet use and provided a filtered service to their students, but others were not aware of this and therefore this might be an area for ICON to consider in further training with homestays.

One area where the response was very mixed was with regards to contact with the Schools. Particularly in the case of day students, several homestays reported that they had excellent contact with the Schools and received all information as a parent would do. However, in



other cases this was not so and the homestays felt a little at a loss. I would recommend ICON look carefully at this matter and encourage Schools to copy homestays into their e-mails so that they are aware of what is happening at the School.

Some of the homestays had been invited to School events either by the students or the School and they had very much enjoyed going to support their student. In some cases the homestays felt a little in the dark when it came to academic matters as they were not told formally about reports or parents' evenings and yet they wanted to support the academic progress of their students. Again this may be an area for ICON to consider in cases where the homestays wish to offer this extra level of support.

In all cases ICON had been to visit the homestay before they accepted students and they had also undertaken a basic health and safety assessment of the property. In all cases I was able to see gas safety certificates and all homestays completing the questionnaire also reported to have gas safety certificates in place. All of those visited had carbon monoxide detectors installed and all but one of those responding to the questionnaire had as well. Finally, all homestays had smoke alarms fitted and tested them regularly.

ICON had discussed fire prevention with all homestays and in many cases they had also discussed the electrical installation. Home insurance documents were seen to be up-to-date and those who I visited had informed their insurer that they were hosting paying students in their homes.

Where homestays used their cars to transport students there seemed to be a little confusion over insurance documents. The vast majority had informed their insurers that they were providing transport for students but not all had sent their documents to ICON. This is an area that can be followed up during the office visit.

Whilst the homestays felt well supported by ICON, there was no evidence of any regular training and all of those spoken to said they would welcome a chance to get together to discuss experiences. Indeed, a small group did meet regularly to do just that but not under any arrangement involving ICON. This is an area that ICON might consider as a form of sharing good practice and further supporting their homestays.

All homestays were visited at least annually by a member of ICON staff and many were visited termly. There was a general feeling that ICON staff knew the students well and cared for them.

The issue of suitcase storage was raised by a couple of homestays but in terms of their shock that some families had been charging for storage. In addition one homestay was concerned that the ICON students were free to do as they liked during the day and didn't have to say where they were going as long as they were back on time. Given that this student was 18, I wasn't too concerned but it may be something worth considering encouraging homestays to build a bond with their students so that they do know where they are when they are not at home, as a parent would do with their own child.

Finally a couple of homestays said that they hadn't heard until late in the summer that they would be hosting students and this had come as a bit of a shock in a few cases. In addition in very few cases the level of English the students had was very limited and this had initially caused some communication issues. These families felt it would have been useful to know this in advance and to have a little support during the first few weeks.

### **Conclusion**

Parents, students and Homestays all seem to report that they are happy with the work that ICON does. There are clearly some very good things happening within the company and staff working for ICON as local guardians are providing an excellent service as are those members of staff based in their offices.

It is clear that ICON have worked hard to bring their provision in line with the AEGIS standards and this has been acknowledged by all groups and the evidence of this is clear to see. There are a few areas where further work needs to be done to ensure consistency amongst all areas of the business but I am confident that this will be taken on board.

### **3. Lead Inspector's Report based on the Stage Two Assessment Framework and Standards 1.1-8.5**

#### **Standards 1.1 – 1.21 Criteria not fully met.**

It is clear that ICON understand the importance of gathering the necessary information about Homestays, schools and students. Safeguarding is given due consideration. Vetting is undertaken well, with DBS checks undertaken on all necessary individuals; Homestays and staff. Best practice is followed, so that checks are renewed every three years. References are sought and kept on record, although in the case of some older appointments, both references are personal ones; it is recommended that one is a professional reference. It is evident that staff are in close contact with Local Authorities when the need arises to work with them on private fostering. They are aware of the fact that Local Authorities have different expectations, and demonstrate how they meet their requirements. The information was explained verbally, and although staff could produce a trail of information if necessary, by looking through emails, it was suggested that consideration should be given to organisation records so that a clear trail of information/ contact is in place.

Checks are made to help ensure that Homestays are suitable and students are well looked after. The Homestay Manager visits Homestays at least annually, and guardians make regular visits to see students. However, again, it was suggested that all checks are recorded, including a more detailed checklist to be used on annual home visits to ensure that all health and safety aspects continue to be of a satisfactory standard. Training is provided to staff and Homestays on child protection in the form of an in-house training package. It was suggested that moving forward ICON should consider moving towards providing a certificated course for Homestays and staff, and consider how they provide updates on a regular basis in between training. ICON were keen to work with AEGIS once our Safeguarding package has been developed. The DSL has suitable training, and due to the manager recently leaving suddenly, there is no deputy in place. It was recommended that the assistant office manager completes the training as soon as possible in order to ensure that there is suitable cover for the role at all times. This training is now being organised. The safeguarding policy contains suitable information, although some students, schools and Homestays spoken to did not know who the DSL was despite this being clearly displayed in the policy. It was suggested that this information might be moved to the front of the policy, and for students to have an emergency card that includes this information on alongside other key contact information. The Guardians undertake their roles diligently, communicating with Schools, parents and students regularly. They use the parent's forum to communicate with parents, although record keeping as a whole requires development, as information, when recorded, is stored in different places, and is often in Chinese, making it difficult for managers to monitor practice.

Homestays are provided with a safe care plan, although this requires further information that is specific to the individual students, such as inclusion of personal interests, and welfare information on one document rather than in two separate documents. Contact with parents

appears to be frequent and suitable. This is in the parents' first language and includes a good system whereby parents receive a text message alert when a new piece of information is added to the secure parents' forum. Parents and students receive suitable information about the Homestay, although it is recommended that this is strengthened by providing them with a Homestay profile that includes information about the family, together with various pictures. This would help parents and students envisage what life will be like in the UK before they arrive, especially as not all parents or students are able to visit Homestays before a stay.

An effective emergency contact system is in place, with the service being praised by one school spoken to during the course of the inspection. Staff promptly work on finding Homestays at short notice, and are now to consider putting into place a procedure in the event of a major incidence where multiple students might be affected. There is evidence that ICON work hard to meet parents' needs, and promptly respond to questions or concerns. Suitable arrangements are in place for travel and transport, with a taxi firm of DBS checked drivers being used for airport runs. The new laws on the use of car seats for children up to the age of 12 of a certain size was discussed and taken on board by the organisation. Record keeping requires development, and this will be common thread throughout the report. The company is advised to create an efficient system that will enable the storage of information so that all who need to access the information can do so quickly and efficiently. This will enable management to monitor and oversee practice and procedures. Complaints should be logged, however small, to enable a clear trail of events that would be of great importance should a dispute ever arise. Insurance documentation seen was in date, and there is a suitable complaints procedure in place. ICON were recommended to include AEGIS as an external body for complainants to turn to if their complaint could not be solved by the company itself, once they have gained accreditation. Data protection procedures are suitable, with a policy in place and the company being registered with the ICO. There guardianship has a clear structure, with roles clearly defined.

**Standards 2.1 – 2.14 Criteria met, but a recommendation for improvement.**

Information provided to the Homestay from ICON is suitable. Each Homestay signs comprehensive contracts that clearly set out their responsibilities. The supporting Inspector reported that families visited felt that ICON were extremely professional when it came to business matters and remuneration and they felt well supported. Suitable guidelines are provided for Homestays in the form of the Host Family Guide and Responsibilities document. This includes guidelines on house and car insurance, as well as guidelines on how to look after the student, and the standard of accommodation to be expected. Information on the safe use of the internet is provided and has been recently revised to include greater detail. The Supporting Inspector found that some families were aware of safe practice, such as by providing filtered access to the internet, but others less so. ICON were advised to consider providing further information and training for families to equip them with the knowledge that would help them keep students safe online. Homestays are provided with the necessary policies, including those for safeguarding and complaints. Although ICON have safe care plans in place, these are not sufficiently detailed and require modification so that they include specific welfare detail for individual students within one document. Although the vast majority Homestays felt that they received good information on students' background and medical issues, it will be useful to provide them with a fuller picture of the students' needs and interests. Although Homestays are not expected to liaise with schools; this is the role of the Local Guardian, some are keen to do so, especially those hosting day students. It would be worth ICON considering how to involve these Homestays where they demonstrate an interest in doing so.

**Standards 3.1 – 3.8 Criteria met, but a recommendation for improvement.**

ICON gather the necessary information about the Homestays and other members of their household. They have adopted the best practice model of insisting on undertaking their own DBS checks on potential Homestays and renew these every three years. It was suggested that ICON might like to look in to asking Homestays to sign up for the update service. Homestay files include evidence that the necessary safer recruitment checks are undertaken, and ICON are currently transferring the information of their checks onto a single central record of appointments (SCR). ICON are aware of the need to conduct full checks on all members of the household. The situation of short term visitors was discussed; it was recommended that ICON have a procedure for undertaking Risk Assessments for such visitors where obtaining a DBS would be impossible in the timescale.

**Standards 4.1 – 4.8 Criteria met, but recommendations for improvement.**

Overall, suitable information is provided for parents. Each parent receives a handbook that covers all of the necessary areas. A clear statement of service is provided that details the levels of service to be provided to the student. The parent's forum is an effective way for guardians to provide up to date information on student's welfare and academic progress to parents in their first language. Parents are provided with full details of who to contact in an emergency, but as with the Homestays, Schools and students, it would be beneficial to reinforce who the DSL is.

Management demonstrate that parents are provided with the necessary information and guidance, and can talk about examples of regular communication, although the recording of information is mainly in Chinese, in emails and on the parent's forum, making it difficult for members of the management team who are English speaking to monitor and oversee practice. It would be beneficial for ICON to review their record keeping procedures, with a view to keeping clear evidence trails. ICON do provide parents with information about the Homestay, however, it was suggested that ICON produce a Homestay profile that includes photos and family details. This should be sent prior to students' arrival, so that parents and students have a clear picture of who it is they will be staying with. This is especially valuable for day students.

**Standards 5.1 – 5.3 Criteria met.**

ICON obtain suitable information about the student, successfully meeting the AEGIS requirements. A sample of student's paper files were seen during the visit. These included most of the necessary information, however the registration form does not currently ask for details of any UK contact. ICON staff explained that if there were any UK contacts, these would be noted, but it would be beneficial to add this to the registration form, to alert parents to the fact that should there be a UK contact, they should provide ICON with this information. ICON obtains emergency numbers for parents and students, and contracts between ICON and parents are in place and filed appropriately.

#### **Standards 6.1 – 6.4 Criteria met but recommendations for improvement.**

All of the students interviewed by the Supporting Inspector appeared to be happy with their experiences. Students are provided with a handbook that is well laid out, easy to read, and is age appropriate. There is a Chinese version as well as an English version. This is sent to students prior to arrival, but some students were unclear as to whether they had received the document at this time. It was suggested that in addition to the handbook, ICON sends students various emails and newsletters prior to their arrival in order to drip feed them information. As explained in the previous information for parents section, it would also be beneficial for students to be sent a Homestay profile before their arrival, so that they gain a clear insight into the type of home they are going to be staying in, and have an introduction to the family members and their interests. It was also recommended that Guardians go through the handbook upon arrival in the UK so that they are confident that students fully understand the content, and provide opportunity for any questions to be answered. Students are provided with details of whom to contact in an emergency, and all reported that they had the telephone and 'WeChat' details for staff. However, some students spoken to during the inspection process were unclear as to who the DSL was and how they would contact them. It was suggested that ICON produce emergency cards that can be issued to students and contain all emergency contact numbers for ICON, the DSL, their guardian, Homestay and School.

#### **Standards 7.1 – 7.7 Criteria met.**

Schools are provided with a comprehensive booklet that outlines the service they provide, full contact details, and suitable information from the student, Homestay and parents handbooks. The Supporting Inspector reported that in discussion with schools, and the responses to the questionnaire, it was found that a variable amount of information was given to schools - where ICON were acting as agent as well as guardian the information was good. In contrast some Schools reported that they had no information about the types of service that ICON provides. This could be due to the fact that the information had not been passed to the relevant person when the School received it. Nevertheless, ICON were asked to consider how they can improve the consistency of information provided to Schools so that all feel suitably informed. ICON provide specific information regarding the student and this was seen as a strength, with 80% of schools being extremely satisfied with the levels of contact, and the remaining 20% being satisfied. The guardians visit Schools regularly, and schools report extremely positively about the communication and contact they have. These visits along with any other forms of communication now need to be logged with notes recorded, in order to create a full evidence base of practice. (See recommendation in section 1.) Any changes to agreed periods of stay, as well as details of Homestays are efficiently provided to schools by ICON, and Schools noted that they were extremely satisfied with the Homestay arrangements.

**Standards 8.1 – 8.5 Criteria met, but a recommendation for improvement.**

ICON have good systems in place to obtain the required information from Schools. They obtain and produce clear lists of contacts, information such as the houses children are in, and term dates on a useful school form. Reports are obtained and stored in student files. The relationship between guardians and Schools is strong. Information is requested from the School, as are regular updates, and parents are informed about these via the parent forum. As with other records, these are usually stored in Chinese, therefore a log of visits and communication in English would be useful to enable members of the management team who speak English have a clear oversight of the work of guardians. Weekly meetings do provide management with some insight, but no records from these meetings were evident during the meeting and it was advised that ICON record notes so that they have a clear evidence base of their work and decisions that have been made.



#### 4. Final Summary of Judgement

**The summary incorporates feedback from both Lead and Supporting Inspectors and is supported by evidence and comments included within the Stage Two Assessment Framework.**

Following the completion of Stage One of the accreditation process, ICON presented a suitable range of documentation in preparation for Stage Two. There is clear evidence that they have paid due care and attention to follow the standards, and evidence gathered both through the Supporting Inspector's work and meeting at the UK Office supported the view that ICON provides a good level of service to its students and their parents. There is a clear structure of management in place, with the roles of all staff suitably defined. The general requirements outlined in section one are met well. Safeguarding is taken seriously, with an efficient system of safer recruitment checks in place for both Homestays and staff. The monitoring of Homestays takes place at least annually, and training is provided for staff and Homestays on child protection. ICON have a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) that is suitably trained. Due to a staff member recently leaving, there is currently no deputy DSL, and ICON are recommended to train a member of the management team to undertake the role. They are also advised to move towards offering a certificated training for other staff and Homestays in the future. Guardians undertake their roles responsibly, with regular communication with parents taking place, usually in their first language. Contact with the school is a considerable strength, with some reporting weekly visits. The Supporting Inspector found that all parties knew how to contact ICON in an emergency, although not all knew who the DSL was and it is recommended that this information is made clearer to Homestays, Students, Parents and Schools. Emergencies are handled well, and ICON are now asked to produce a plan should there ever be a major incident to manage. Inspectors recognise that not all parents and students are able to travel to meet Homestays before term starts. Whilst email contact is made before a student visits a home, it is recommended that ICON produces a Homestay profile that provides information to students and parents about the home they will be staying in, as well as useful information on the Homestay members. ICON works hard to meet the needs of parents, and makes appropriate travel and transport arrangements for students. Private fostering arrangements are fully understood, with ICON liaising efficiently with Local Authority Children's Services Private Fostering Teams where necessary. The main issue with section 1 comes with record keeping - whilst procedures on the ground are robust, with the student clearly being well cared for by ICON, as it grows, there is a greater need to develop systems for recording information and storing this in an information hub so that all staff who need information can access it easily. This would enable management to monitor records and oversee the effectiveness of practice, and would provide a valuable evidence base should there ever be any issues.

Overall, suitable information is provided to the Homestays. Comprehensive contracts are in place, and Homestays are provided with suitable guidance about how to look after a student, as well as on health and safety requirements for the home, including insurance.

Some families were fully aware of the need for adopting safe internet practice, although some were less aware. ICON are advised to provide training in this area to help families fully understand the dangers and how they can help keep students safe. Homestays are provided with some information about the students they are to host, although the Supporting Inspector found that some Homestays were unsure about student's hobbies and interests. It was recommended that ICON enhance the current safe care plan to include greater information on the student so that Homestays gain a full picture of the student's needs and interests. The Supporting Inspector found the quality of Homestays to be of a high standard. They took an interest in the student they were hosting; often keen to play a greater role in the student's education that was expected. It would be worthwhile for ICON to consider how they could utilise these enthusiastic Homestays fully, especially those that host day students. Suitable information is gathered about the Homestay. The files sampled included necessary documentation, although it was recommended that where possible, ICON should ask for one professional reference, rather than giving the option of two personal referees. Suitable information is gathered, and checks made on other Homestay members. It was recommended that short term visitors should be risk assessed should they be staying when a student is in residence, and timescales would make a DBS impossible. Homestays are made aware of the need to inform ICON of any changes in their circumstances.

Parents receive a suitable amount of information from ICON. The parent handbook is comprehensive, and includes the required information. They receive a statement of service and details on who to contact in an emergency. Details are provided about the Homestay, but it is recommended that a Homestay profile is created to provide parent greater insight into the home their child will be staying in, and the people that will be looking after them. Guardians are in frequent contact with parents; at least once a week, using email, 'WeChat' and the parent's forum as primary methods for communication. Parents are asked about the vast majority of the required information on registration, and this is recorded in paper files. A suitable contract is in place. ICON were advised to ask for any UK contact details on the registration form, although staff did state that should there be a UK contact identified to them, they would make a note of it.

Students are provided with a suitable handbook, containing the required AEGIS information. There is both a Chinese and English version. The Supporting Inspector found that some students had read this prior to arrival, but others had not. ICON are advised to drip feed information to students prior to arrival in the form of communication such as emails and newsletters, in addition to sending the handbook. When students arrive, it is advised that guardians should meet the students to go through the handbook to ensure that they understand the content and have an opportunity to ask any questions. Students were happy with the levels of communication and contact that they received from their Guardian and ICON as a whole, and knew how to contact staff. However, students were unclear as to who the DSL was. It is recommended that ICON produce an emergency card that students

can carry, which includes all emergency contact details for ICON, the DSL, the Homestay and the school.

ICON has fostered excellent links with the Schools that it works with. Feedback received by the Supporting Inspector was very positive, with 80% extremely satisfied with the levels of contact and the remaining 20% being satisfied; these are very high percentages of satisfaction. Large numbers of Schools report that ICON staff are in touch most weeks. ICON produce a comprehensive booklet that includes information on the statement of service, contact details and other useful information, alongside links to the key policies, including safeguarding. The Supporting Inspector did find a variable amount of information is given to schools, and that this was often greater when ICON acts as agents as well as guardians. ICON were recommended to investigate this and ensure that all Schools receive an appropriate amount to information. It is important to check that the information has reached the relevant staff in the School (not just the admissions department/registrar) as this could be one of the reasons why some staff who were spoken to felt they had not received a suitable amount. Suitable and timely information is provided to Schools about Homestays, any changes of to the agreed periods of stay, as well as transport arrangements. ICON seek the necessary information from Schools and have fostered good two-way working partnerships. The guardians regularly visit, and gather welfare and academic information. This is shared with parents on the parent's forum; it is useful that this is sent in the parents first language, however ICON are advised to keep a record in English that can be added to the recommended information hub so that all relevant staff, including members of the management team, have a clear oversight of the service provided for the students in their care and the contact that has been maintained with Schools.

**Recommendations:****Standards 1.1 – 1.21**

Strengthen record keeping systems so that all necessary information is logged and stored efficiently, creating a clear evidence base that enables greater monitoring by management.

*To be implemented by September 2017*

Consider moving to providing Homestays and staff with a certificated safeguarding course. (Advisory - no timescale set)

Train a member of management to be a deputy designated safeguarding lead, ensuring that the course content is appropriate for the role.

*As soon as possible but to be implemented no later than September 2017*

**Standards 2.1 – 2.14**

Revise the safe care plans so that they include welfare information on the student in order to provide Homestays with all of the necessary information in one place, and seek permission from parents to share this information with the relevant parties.

*To be implemented by September 2017*

Consider providing training for families (and staff) on the safe use of the internet/prevent awareness.

*To be implemented by September 2017*

**Standards 3.1-3.8**

Produce a procedure for undertaking a risk assessment where Homestay families alert the organisation when they have a short term visitor staying at the house and the timescale would mean undertaking a DBS would be impossible.

*To be implemented by September 2017*

**Standards 4.1-4.8**

Produce a Homestay profile that gives parents a clear insight into where their child will be staying and who will be looking after them.

*To be implemented by September 2017*

**Standards 6.1-6.4**

Produce an emergency card for students, providing them with all of the necessary emergency numbers, including for the DSL.

When the students arrive in the UK, ensure that guardians take time to go through the student handbook, and answer any questions they may have, so that they are confident they have a securer understanding of the requirements.

*To be implemented by September 2017*

## 5. Conclusion

ICON is a growing Guardianship Organisation that is clearly committed to following AEGIS standards and adopting best practice models. Management listened carefully and acted upon guidance given, and are developing robust systems that once fully implemented, will withstand the potential growth in student numbers that they are predicting.

Due care and attention is given to safeguarding students, and to providing suitable Homestays that are clearly very dedicated to their role. The levels of communication with Schools are also highly commendable. There is clear satisfaction evident from all parties that ICON works with.

ICON now needs to act upon all of the recommendations in this report to strengthen their practice further. Accordingly the Inspectors are happy to recommend that ICON are accredited to AEGIS and Taylor Education will work closely with ICON to ensure that the recommendations are put in place over the coming months.

Accreditation was confirmed by the AEGIS Board of Trustees on the 29th March 2017, on the understanding that the recommendations are completed by the given dates.

The next re-accreditation inspection will be due in March 2021.

ICON may use any statements from this report in marketing or publicity materials, but such statements must be placed in context, stated in full and include reference to the AEGIS accreditation inspection report March 2017.