

# Slough Children's Services Trust

Slough Children's Services Trust Limited (09487106)

Ground Floor West, St Martin's Place, 51 Bath Road, Slough, Buckinghamshire SL1 3UF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Slough Children's Service Trust (SCST) is an independent, not-for-profit company that provides social care and support services to children, young people and families. The fostering service is situated within the trust and offers placements to Slough children. The agency is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). The agency currently supports 46 fostering households that are providing care for 54 children and young people.

**Inspection dates:** 18 to 22 June 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account**

**requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

inadequate

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of last inspection:** 5 December 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- There has been no registered manager in the service for twelve months, and this has been detrimental to the oversight and management of the service.
- Some supervising staff do not assure themselves of the welfare of children placed with foster carers. They have focused on the foster carers and not the needs of children.
- Staff are poorly managed. They do not receive regular effective supervision, nor has their performance been assessed and managed robustly. Staff have not been held to account for their practice, which creates risk that may affect children's welfare.
- Senior leaders do not know the strengths and weaknesses of the agency, they have not addressed previous requirements and recommendations made.
- Staff do not routinely complete thorough matching and assessment processes prior to placing a child with a foster carer.
- Senior leaders and managers have not ensured that they complete investigations as requested by the local authority designated officer.
- Leaders and managers have not notified HMCI of incidents when required to.
- Recruitment process are not thorough so do not evidence that managers have assured themselves that staff are suitable.
- Senior leaders do not maintain clear records of complaints. They have not ensured that they respond to complaints in line with their policy and procedure.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Foster carers provide good-quality care and support to children who, in turn, make progress while in their care. Most children build good relationships of trust with carers.
- Children are all engaged in education with clear individual support plans that assist them to achieve their full potential.
- Carers support children to attend to their physical and emotional healthcare needs.
- Foster carers develop positive support structures that assist and mentor peers.
- Staff are supportive and provide opportunities in which carers gain support and guidance that assist them in times of crisis and challenge.

- The journey, process and experience of newly approved carers has improved.
- Good-quality foster carer assessments are completed in a timely way. The scrutiny and quality assurance role of panel is thorough, with records detailing clear evidence and rationale to support recommendations.

## What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>Statement of purpose and children's guide</p> <p>The fostering service provider must produce a written guide to the fostering service ("the children's guide") which includes—</p> <p>a summary of the statement of purpose,</p> <p>a summary of the procedure (<i>the representations and complaints procedure</i>) established—</p> <p>in the case of an independent fostering agency, under regulation 18(1),</p> <p>the address, including email address, and telephone number of the Chief Inspector.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the children's guide to the Chief Inspector, to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child's age and understanding).</p> <p>((3)(a)(b)(i)(c)(4) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011))</p>	01/08/2018
<p>Independent fostering agencies — duty to secure welfare</p> <p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, and</p> <p>before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the</p>	01/08/2018

<p>child's— wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding), and</p> <p>religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.</p> <p>((11)(a)(b)(i)(ii) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011))</p>	
<p>Arrangements for the protection of children</p> <p>The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for—</p> <p>notification of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiries involving a child placed by the fostering service provider, to the Chief Inspector,</p> <p>written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response.</p> <p>((12)(3)(c)(d) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011))</p>	01/08/2018
<p>Independent fostering agencies — complaints and representations</p> <p>Ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation.</p> <p>((18)(4) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011))</p>	01/08/2018
<p>Staffing of fostering service</p> <p>The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to—</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>((19)(b) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011))</p>	01/08/2018
<p>Fitness of workers</p> <p>The fostering service provider must not—</p>	01/08/2018

<p>employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1.</p> <p>((20(1)(a)(2)(3)(a)(b)(c) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011))</p>	
<p>Employment of staff</p> <p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal.</p> <p>((21)(4)(a) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011))</p>	01/08/2018
<p>Notifiable events</p> <p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table.</p> <p>Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing.</p> <p>((36)(1)(2) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011))</p>	01/08/2018

## Recommendations

- Ensure that: all foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes; the fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline; the fostering service's policy is made clear to the responsible authority/placing authority, child and parent/s or carers before the placement begins or, in an emergency placement, at the time of the placement. ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 3.8)
- Implement a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 4.5)  
In particular by ensuring that safe care plans are effective documents.
- Ensure that the fostering service works effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection, for example the responsible authority, schools, hospitals, general practitioners, and does not work in isolation from them. ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 4.7)
- Only suggest foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 15.1)
- Prior to the placement of each child, ensure that the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. Provide the information in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service should follow up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer him/herself safe. ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 15.2)
- The registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them. ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 25.8)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

Children make progress while living with their foster families. They benefit from the good relationships of trust they build and develop with foster carers. Carers provide stability, security, support and good-quality care to the children who live with them. Foster carers provide consistency and most children remain in placement for several years.

Staff regularly seek children's views, especially prior to the review of their care, although records do not routinely reflect the child's voice. The children's guide is not in a version which is accessible to all, especially those who have impaired communication and cognition. The participation officer requests that children complete surveys to gather children's views and wishes. However, the agency has not developed systems to ensure that they gain or reflect the views of all children.

Foster carers support children to engage in a wide variety of activities, experiences hobbies and interests. Children develop self-esteem and their confidence improves.

Children enjoy good support from foster carers who ensure that their health needs are met. Carers explore the support offered to promote children's emotional and physical health. The support offered by the organisation 'well-being team' assists children to make sense of their stories, journeys and circumstances. The guidance and support offered to some foster carers is positive and enables them to be more resilient and have a better insight into and understanding of causes for a child's behaviour.

The importance of education is embraced by all in the agency and there are good, effective links with the virtual school. Children benefit from the well-thought-out individual education plans that support them to achieve their full potential.

Foster carers promote and support children to maintain beneficial relationships with family and friends through carefully planned contact.

Staff do not routinely assess or evidence their thoughts, considerations and rationale for matching. They do not explore risk or potential gaps in meeting need to ensure that these are addressed. The information children and carers receive prior to placement is inconsistent in quality and detail. On one occasion, staff increased a carer's approved numbers without following the required process and procedure.

Placement agreements are available although they vary in quality, detail and the information they provide. A placement meeting delay of 12 working days was noted in one case. However, there are good examples of assessment and matching processes in the agency when staff consider and explore long-term matches for children.

Foster carers are well supported by staff, including through support groups and coffee mornings.

Staff have amended the system and process to manage the recruitment of prospective carers. This has impacted positively on the assessment journey for prospective carers who report that it is timely, and their experience is positive.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Children have good relationships with foster carers and they seek their advice, guidance and support when worried or concerned. Carers and staff access a wide variety of training that promotes their knowledge and understanding about risk factors.

Leaders and managers have not implemented robust and effective systems to ensure that they have a clear understanding of current issues. They do not review, evaluate and monitor risk. Staff appear to focus on carers' needs. They do not evidence that they fully consider the needs of the child placed with carers. Staff are not clear of their roles and responsibilities to manage risk. They do not always assure themselves that others have responded to risk as required.

Allegations are referred if required but leaders and managers have not followed these matters up effectively. For example, they did not instigate or complete an investigation when requested. Records do not provide a clear evidence trail from instigation to outcome.

Staff do not routinely evidence how they assess and manage risk. They do not complete risk assessments and foster carers lack clarity about actions they should take to manage and minimise risk. There are no plans to direct foster carers in the required response when a child is missing. Carers did, however, apply their own insight and knowledge to report and locate a child who was missing from care.

Leaders and managers do not maintain a central log of complaints. Due to this, they did not respond to a complaint received as required. They did not follow the organisation's policy and procedure. Likewise, other matters of concern have not been addressed or responded to in a timely manner including staff grievances.

Foster carers access basic training that informs them of the organisation's preferred response to negative behaviour. However, foster carers have not been offered behaviour management training to support them when caring for a child who exhibits physically challenging behaviour. Leaders, managers and staff do not have a formal recording and review system that monitors foster carers responses to behaviour. One member of staff has worked with others to develop a clear behaviour support plan that promotes a consistent approach to the management of negative behaviour, but this is not widely used.

Recruitment procedures do not demonstrate a thorough and robust application of safer recruitment procedures. Inspectors found a lack of evidence to show that, as far

as reasonably possible, they understood why previous employment ceased, nor did they verify the authenticity of all references that were received. One record lacked evidence that gaps in employment history were explored.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate**

The fostering service is not well led or managed. There has been no registered manager for over a year. This has led to instability, inconsistency and ineffective management of the service. No one has been identified to have oversight of the service. If this is not addressed swiftly it will have greater negative impact and create risks to the welfare of children.

HMCI have not been notified of significant events that relate to the welfare and protection of children.

Leaders, managers and staff do not appear to understand the necessity or urgency to implement and sustain change. The service lacks direction. The ethos and culture of the service, as identified in its statement of purpose, is not evident in staff practice.

Senior leaders do not understand the strengths and weaknesses in the service. Leaders, managers and staff have not addressed or implemented actions to rectify and improve previously identified areas of weakness. There is no service development plan.

Data provided during the inspection was incorrect and misleading. Leaders have not formulated a contingency plan that identifies who is responsible and accountable for the service while there is no manager. Senior leaders are in the process of recruiting a manager for the service.

Staff are not well managed. They have not been consistently managed due to the turnover of staff. Staff have not received regular effective supervision which promotes development, reflection or learning or holds staff to account for their behaviour and practice. Records do not evidence thorough monitoring and review of performance and significant drift has occurred. Leaders have not been clear in their communication with staff. There is confusion about roles, responsibilities and boundaries. Some staff have multiple roles but how they manage these is problematic. An example is a social worker who supports a foster carer for part of their role as well as working in another team within the wider trust.

Foster carers do receive regular supervision and they have an annual formal review that ensures that they provide good-quality care.

The current arrangements for panel ensure that they apply a rigorous quality assurance role to reviews and assessments. The panel is diverse, with members each bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge. Panel records provide clarity and evidence that promotes good development of staff and practitioners.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** 1183495

**Registered provider:** Slough Children's Services Trust Limited (09487106)

**Registered provider address:** Ground Floor West, St Martin's Place, 51 Bath Road, Slough, Buckinghamshire SL1 3UF

**Responsible individual:** Jackie Pape

**Registered manager:** post vacant

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## **Inspectors**

Amanda Maxwell, social care inspector

James Harmon, social care inspector

Amanda Harvey, social care inspector



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