

Slough Children's Services Trust

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

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Slough Children's Service Trust 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. The agency currently supports 46 fostering households that are providing care for 57 children and young people.

Inspection date: 20 May 2020

Date of previous inspection: 8 April 2019

This monitoring visit

This announced monitoring visit follows the findings of the last full inspection, conducted on 8 April 2019. The service was judged inadequate, and seven requirements were made. Four of these requirements were issued as compliance notices, in respect of regulation 8, regulation 11, regulation 12 and regulation 20 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. Two further monitoring visits occurred, on 6 June 2019 and 1 August 2019, to check on the progress made in relation to the four compliance notices. These were found to be met.

The purpose of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that the agency has made in addressing the three remaining requirements, under regulations 17, 19 and 21 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

In accordance with Ofsted guidance on COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions, this visit was undertaken remotely. Telephone discussions were held with the registered manager, responsible individual, chief executive, supervising social workers and foster carers. Various documents were emailed to the inspectors that were also considered.

Since the last monitoring visit on 1 August 2019, there have been changes in the leadership and management arrangements. The newly appointed service manager successfully registered as the manager with Ofsted on 22 August 2019. The assistant director of quality and improvement, practice and performance has taken over the responsible individual role from the director of operations.

Over the past nine months, the registered manager, with the support and guidance from senior managers, has worked hard to address the previously identified shortfalls. Since joining the agency, she has had a clear vision for the service. A detailed improvement plan has helped to maintain her focus on the areas of required improvement. This has largely focused on embedding new ways of working, for example the referral and matching process, improving performance and compliance and improving working relationships. Through her leadership, there has been a notable shift in the practice, culture and morale within the team. Most staff and foster carers said that the changes in the ways of working have been positive and that they feel supported.

The first remaining requirement focused on ensuring that foster carers have the necessary skills, knowledge or practical guidance to provide the children with the care that they need, resulting in some children experiencing disruption, placements breaking down and bridging placements being used excessively.

The implementation of a new referral and matching process, including out of hours, means that thoughtful consideration is given to all new placements. The registered manager now has full autonomy for these decisions. This has helped to ensure that foster carers are involved in children's moves from the beginning in a planned way. A recent example of a child moving into a fostering household showed that there is a strong focus on ensuring that the move is right for the child and for the children already living there.

The agency's training programme has been reviewed, and there is a clear programme in place for foster carers that identifies their training needs. This is closely monitored by the managers to ensure that the foster carers are up to date. Performance reporting showed that foster carers receive visits from the supervising social workers according to their level of need. For example, one foster carer had 23 visits in a year. Most foster carers spoken to during this visit said that there is a clear support system in place that they know how to access. They also said that the new approach and support mean that they now feel part of the agency.

The second remaining requirement focused on the agency ensuring that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced staff who safeguard and promote the health and welfare of the children placed with foster carers.

Since August 2019, the registered manager has been instrumental in improving the service. Her appointment means that the staff and foster carers have benefited from improving stability. However, the high turnover of practice managers and staff

sickness within the team has resulted in foster carers feeling frustrated about the continual changes in relationships. These factors also hamper the pace of the overall improvement journey. Although performance monitoring data shows that tasks are being completed, the registered manager fully understands the need to focus on quality.

A review and subsequent restructure of the team carried out by the chief executive and the registered manager, which included a skills analysis, mean that all staff now have new job descriptions and more generic roles. Overall, these changes have been welcomed by the team, and those who remain are committed and positive about the future. However, some staff have left the service, which has meant that agency staff have been used to fill the gaps. Acknowledging the impact of this on the service, senior managers are actively recruiting to the vacancies that exist with the aim of creating a more stable workforce. Recent appointments to practice manager roles have strengthened the team. The induction of new staff is not consistent and, while there is a recognition of transferable skills, not all staff have been given guidance in key areas, for example regulations and assessments.

The introduction of risk management plans has provided a good starting point when exploring and managing risk. Discussions with foster carers and staff during this monitoring visit confirmed that there is now a much greater level of risks being considered, particularly at the matching stage of new referrals.

The final remaining requirement focused on the agency ensuring that staff receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal.

The training matrix for all staff shows that there is a wide range of training opportunities for staff, including bespoke training to meet individual needs. The new training programme is also more accessible with lots of training available online. The registered manager's monitoring shows a significant increase in uptake during the latter part of last year. Staff spoken to during this visit were very positive about the training on offer, particularly in supporting their continual professional development and safeguarding the children.

The performance data shows that supervision meetings are taking place regularly. Records show that all staff, including managers, are given the opportunity to discuss personal and professional matters, and discussions are reflective. They also evidence the improvement journey that the service, staff and foster carers have been on, including notable changes in practice. Leaders reported that all staff received an appraisal in the last annual cycle. This year's cycle is well under way, with some staff having already met with their line managers and other meetings booked to take place within the next month. The quality of those looked at during this visit was good.

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
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— the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation (19)(b))	30/11/2020

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to monitor the action taken and the progress made by the independent fostering agency since its last Ofsted inspection.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 1183495

Registered provider: Slough Children's Services Trust Limited

Registered provider address: Slough Children's Trust, St. Martins Place, 51 Bath Road, Slough, Berkshire SL1 3UF

Responsible individual: Parmjit Chahal

Registered manager: Saima Arif

Inspectors

Amanda Harvey, social care inspector (lead inspector)

Maria Lonergan, social care inspector

Maire Atherton, her majesty's inspector

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