

## Slough Children's Services Trust

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

# Assurance visit

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Slough Children's Services 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 41 fostering households that are providing care for 51 children and young people.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 22 August 2019.

**Visit dates:** 17 to 18 November 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 8 April 2019

**Previous inspection judgement:** Inadequate

## Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Findings from the visit**

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

### **The care of children**

The registered manager gives thoughtful consideration about where children should live and includes foster carers in these decisions. Records of this show that placements are well planned, even in emergency circumstances, and that all relevant information is available from the start. This means that children are cared for by foster carers who have the right skills and experience to meet the children's individual needs.

Foster carers understand the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on children, particularly in relation to the disruption of their normal routines. One foster carer that an inspector spoke to explained how they had worked closely with the virtual head to ensure that the child was able to continue attending school during the first national lockdown.

Children's views are routinely sought using a variety of methods. The resulting information and feedback provide reassuring evidence to agency leaders that the children have good relationships with their foster carers and like being part of their family.

### **The safety of children**

The agency's response to COVID-19 has been thorough. Continuity plans ensure that foster carers have support available to them during periods of restrictions and self-isolation. This has included having respite arrangements set up should foster carers become too unwell to care for the children. The agency's staff have also remained in regular contact with the foster carers to provide up-to-date advice and guidance, particularly on things that matter to children, such as Halloween.

Safeguarding children is seen by everyone at the agency as a priority. Detailed plans provide foster carers with clear advice and guidance on how to manage risk and behaviour. Due to COVID-19, the scheduled training was cancelled, and quickly supplemented by online courses being made available.

Children's safety and well-being are closely monitored by the registered manager. This includes ensuring that concerns and incidents are reported in a timely manner. When practice falls short of what is expected, action is taken to prevent a reoccurrence.

### **Leaders and managers**

The registered manager and responsible individual have created a stable management team that fully supports the work of the supervising social workers.

New team leaders are already making a difference to foster carers' and children's lives by covering sickness absence when necessary. Foster carers spoken to speak highly of the agency staff and the support they provide.

The process for recommending foster carers for approval is working well. Feedback from panel members spoken to is positive. Records show that panels have continued to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit virtually. The responsible individual, acting in the role of the agency decision-maker, is providing good oversight and scrutiny of the whole process.

The registered manager has a range of mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of care provided. These processes have been enhanced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that the standard of care is maintained.

The remaining requirement from the last monitoring visit in May 2020 has been met. The agency team has worked hard to recruit to all of the vacant practice manager and social worker posts. As a result, there is now a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced staff working in the team.

No requirements or recommendations are made following this visit.

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** 1183495

**Registered provider:** Slough Children's Services Trust Limited

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

**Responsible individual:** Brent Lumley

**Registered manager:** Saima Arif

### **Inspectors:**

Amanda Harvey, Social Care Inspector

Sarah Olliver, Social Care Inspector

Vevene Muhammad, Social Care Inspector

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