

Clifford House Fostering

Clifford House Fostering Limited

Senate House, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove,
Worcestershire B60 4AD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is a private limited company. The agency offers short-term, long-term, bridging and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, there were 43 approved fostering households providing care to 61 children.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since January 2022.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 31 January to 4 February 2022

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 20 November 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make great progress from their starting points because of the care they receive from their carers. Some of the children placed with the agency have lived with their carers for many years. One child told the inspectors, 'I am happy living with my carers and enjoy doing activities together as a family.'

Matching assessments are comprehensive and well informed. This includes a record of the rationale for why a carer can meet the needs of a child. The experienced placement manager has a good understanding of the carers' skills and expertise. This contributes to well-informed decisions being made about carers' abilities to meet the needs of children. As a result, children are safely and carefully matched to carers.

When appropriate, siblings live with the same carers. This supports those children to maintain their relationships with each other. Children can stay with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday. This gives children a sense of security and permanence. It also provides them with important support throughout their further education and in developing essential life skills in readiness for independence.

Children receive key information from the agency that helps them to settle in their foster homes. This includes child-friendly information to help them understand what it means to live with a foster carer. Once settled, children can look after the agency's teddy mascot for the weekend. This gives those children a sense of responsibility and contributes to their developing sense of belonging. Each child is given a personalised memory box to hold mementos of happy times. This helps children to feel valued and welcomed.

Children's healthcare needs are understood well by their carers and are met, including for those children with complex health needs. Children are supported to attend all routine and specialist health appointments. One child has a particularly complex health need. The carers and agency are working hard to support this child in line with their medical needs.

The agency has good oversight of children's education attendance and attainment. An education adviser from the organisation offers advice to supervising social workers to promote education and identify those children most at risk of exclusion. As a result, children who have a history of non-attendance have been supported well to re-engage in education.

The agency provides foster carers with suitable training, supervision and regular supervising social work visits. An effective out-of-hours service means that foster carers can speak to a supervising social worker any time of day, should this be needed. The level of support that foster carers receive helps to reduce the number of placement breakdowns and helps maintain placement stability for children. Children make good progress because of this.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Children feel safe in their foster homes. Foster carers attend relevant training that helps them to understand and respond to concerns about children's safety. This includes safeguarding training that focuses on the risks to children that can occur outside of the family, such as county lines and criminal exploitation and knife crime. This helps foster carers to implement additional care strategies, which reduce risks for children.

Children's behaviour is managed well, with guidance and support from supervising social workers. Carers respond to children's complex behaviours well. This is because supervising social workers encourage them to reflect on their responses to children. Supervising social workers and foster carers can work with advice and guidance from the in-house therapist. This joined-up approach ensures that children are actively safeguarded.

Supervising social workers carry out two unannounced visits to each fostering household every year. Children are spoken to alone. This provides further opportunities to meet with children and ensure that they are safe and happy.

The registered manager takes all allegations about foster carers seriously. She quickly informs relevant partner agencies, in line with good practice. When needed, the agency undertakes detailed investigations and reviews standards of care. These are then considered by the fostering panel, even if foster carers resign during any investigation. For three fostering households, this led to a review at panel and recommendations made for deregistration. This child-centred practice helps to ensure that only adults who are safe care for children.

When children go missing from their homes, foster carers follow plans and share information in a timely way. In addition, the agency ensures that return home interviews are completed. This means that children are provided with the opportunity to explore why they go missing from home.

Recruitment of carers, staff and panel members is robust. There is effective management oversight of recruitment, which helps to ensure that only safe adults provide care and support to children.

Risk assessments and safer caring plans give foster carers information about children's vulnerabilities. These plans are individualised and most guide foster carers in what they need to do to care for children safely. However, in some cases, adults on shared lives placements in fostering households are not included in children's safer caring plans, to ensure actions are in place to keep children safe in their foster families.

Foster carers understand their roles and responsibilities in ensuring that children take medication that is prescribed to them. This includes the accurate recording of

the medication administered. Despite this, one child was not given the required dosage of their prescribed medication for a period of six months, despite the local authority social worker making the agency aware. However, the agency has now acted on this, identified learning and taken steps to ensure that medication is safely administered to children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is passionate, highly committed and has worked hard to create the right environment for staff to work effectively. This has contributed to staff feeling happy and has promoted good staff retention. The stability of the staff team and the child-focused ethos are strengths of the agency.

The registered manager ensures that staff have time to reflect on their practice and have opportunities to continue to learn and develop. This is achieved through regular professional supervision, ongoing training and performance appraisals. This helps to inform and develop staff practice.

Supervising social workers manage small caseloads. This means that foster carers receive a high level of support. Staff are suitably qualified, experienced and highly dedicated to their work. This level of guidance and support ensures that good-quality care is provided to children.

Foster carers have provided very positive feedback about the support they receive from the agency. One foster carer told the inspector the support provided was 'brilliant', with another describing the agency as being 'like family'.

The registered manager has developed positive relationships with partner agencies. Good collaborative working means that children receive well-coordinated care and this contributes to them achieving good outcomes.

The registered manager has good oversight of the agency and understands the agency's strengths and areas for development. The registered manager shares this oversight in a monthly report to the responsible individual. This helps the responsible individual to hold the registered manager to account and provide support and guidance when needed.

To further enhance the oversight of the agency, an independent reviewing officer has been employed who has a high level of scrutiny of the approval of foster carers. Clear reasons for recommendations are made and any concerns are taken to the next available panel for its consideration.

The fostering panel is effective in its independent scrutiny of the decision-making by the agency. This includes rigorous quality assurance of assessments. Clear reasons are given by the panel chair for the recommendations made. Similarly, the agency decision-maker makes clear, timely and reasoned decisions, demonstrating a good

level of reflection and consideration of all elements of the application and approval process.

Foster carers and supervising social workers understand the plans that are in place for children. However, the agency's placement plans are not routinely updated. This means that in some instances changes made to children's care arrangements are not clearly documented on the children's files.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. Specifically, that safer care plans contain relevant information regarding the child's specific needs, and clear strategies for the foster carers to follow. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 14, paragraph 4.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the foster carers keep a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children during their placement. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 18, paragraph 6.11)
- The registered person should ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.6)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: SC416290

Registered provider: Clifford House Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Clifford House Fostering Limited, Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Wavenden, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

Responsible individual: Joanne August

Registered manager: Lesley Greenfield

Telephone number: 01527 559366

Inspectors

Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector

Suzanne Young, Social Care Inspector

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