

Slough Adoption Service

Slough Children First Limited

Observatory House, 25 Windsor Road, Slough SL1 2EL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

This voluntary adoption agency is managed by Slough Children's Services. It is a not-for-profit organisation. It currently has no branches.

It was registered as a voluntary adoption agency by Ofsted on 30 September 2015. It is managed by a newly appointed manager who took over the role on 16 January 2023.

The agency is responsible for family-finding for children from Slough Children's Services. The agency also provides support to families and to adopted adults and birth parents affected by adoption. It also manages the arrangements for children to have post-adoption contact with their birth families.

The agency is part of a regional adoption agency, which it joined on 1 April 2021. Since then, the voluntary adoption agency has not recruited and assessed prospective adopters. This work is undertaken by the regional adoption agency.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 February 2023

Overall experiences and progress of service users, taking into account	good
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How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The voluntary adoption agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 29 October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

The staff team is highly experienced in the field of adoption. They provide high-quality support to children and their adoptive families. This support is ongoing and many families say it is easily accessible.

Feedback from service users is overwhelmingly positive, with adopters saying that they feel heard and that they are not alone when things become challenging. Members of the team are repeatedly mentioned as being exceptional in their knowledge, support and guidance in the family's time of need.

Adopters value the opportunity to meet with other adopters through training and social events. However, in feedback, adopters said they would value further opportunities to meet and socialise with others to develop these connections.

Family-finding is carried out with diligence and rigour. Staff are committed to achieving adoption efficiently and ensuring the best possible match. From the outset, staff do not limit the search to the region. This allows for the best possible match to be identified as soon as possible.

There are strong working relationships between the voluntary adoption agency (VAA) and wider professionals. Staff work collaboratively to ensure that children achieve the best outcomes. An example of this is adopters and children being supported with children's educational needs. Social workers act as advocates when this is appropriate and support adopters to identify and secure the best school for their child.

Post-adoption support is swiftly provided. There are no waiting lists for an assessment of need for adoption support.

There are examples of the child's voice in some aspects of the service. However, this is not consistent across all areas of practice. The agency has not yet developed a system that uses feedback from children to inform future development.

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

Adopters understand what constitutes safeguarding. They feel able to tell social workers when there have been safeguarding concerns. Adopters said they have felt supported in a non-judgemental way through the process of further investigation and have been provided with timely support in these circumstances.

No one spoken to during the inspection raised any safeguarding concerns. The local authority designated officer (LADO) said no concerns had been raised about safeguarding practices at the VAA.

However, the agency had failed to notify Ofsted of some safeguarding concerns, although subsequent action has been taken. Inspectors also found some examples of concerns that the LADO had not been consulted on, despite this being the prescribed action in the agency's policy. However, while aspects of the agency's policy have not always been followed, inspectors found all other actions have been appropriately managed in a timely way, so that children have remained safe.

Adopters have opportunities to meet all the relevant professionals connected to the child as part of the family-finding process. Previously, 'life appreciation days' were consistently held for adoptive families to meet these professionals in person. More recently, this practice has been less consistent.

There are safe recruitment practices in place.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The new manager has been in post since mid-January 2023. Although new to the post, they have relevant experience and knowledge and were promoted from within the team.

There is a small stable team of experienced and passionate social workers. Staff report high team morale and show dedication to their roles. Staff receive high-quality reflective supervision and training relevant to their role.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the weaknesses of the service and the areas for further development. They are committed to achieving their own goals to maintain a high standard of support for children and their adoptive families.

While placement disruptions are low in this agency, inspectors identified areas when learning from the few that had occurred, had not been identified.

Positive professional relationships are evident between the agency and colleagues in the regional adoption agency and the children's trust. However, financial arrangements are complex and not fully understood by adopters. There are some challenges that are causing adopters unnecessary stress once children join their family. Responsibility is falling to the VAA to support adopters in these circumstances, which could be more efficiently managed.

The VAA shares a panel with the regional adoption agency. The panel chair said reports submitted to panel are of high quality, social workers are well informed and strong matches are referred to panel, with no evident unnecessary delays.

What does the voluntary adoption 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, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 or any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered provider and the manager shall compile in relation to the agency a written statement (in these Regulations referred to as "the statement of purpose") which shall consist of a statement as to the matters listed in Schedule 1.</p> <p>The registered provider and the manager shall provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the registration authority and—</p> <p>if the registration authority is the Commission and the agency has a branch in Wales, to the Assembly;</p> <p>if the registration authority is the Assembly and the agency has a branch in England, to the Commission.</p> <p>The registered provider and the manager shall make a copy of the statement of purpose available, upon request, for inspection by—</p> <p>any person working for the purposes of the agency;</p> <p>children who may be adopted, their parents and guardians;</p> <p>persons wishing to adopt a child;</p> <p>adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians;</p> <p>any local authority.</p> <p>(‘Voluntary adoption agencies (miscellaneous amendments) regulations’, 2003, Regulation 3 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b)(c)(d) (e))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the statement of purpose is sent to the regulator in a timely manner.</p>	31 March 2023

<p>If, in relation to an agency, any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 4 takes place, the registered provider and the manager shall without delay notify the person indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of that table.</p> <p>Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally shall be confirmed in writing within 14 days.</p> <p>In the table—</p> <p>"approved by the agency" means approved by the agency as suitable to be an adoptive parent in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983;</p> <p>"area authority" means the local authority in whose area the child is placed for adoption;</p> <p>"placing agency" means the adoption agency that placed the child for adoption with the prospective adopter;</p> <p>"Primary Care Trust" means the Primary Care Trust in whose area the child is placed for adoption by the agency; and</p> <p>"Local Health Board" means the Local Health Board in whose area the child is placed for adoption by the agency. (‘Voluntary adoption agencies (miscellaneous amendments) regulations’, 2003, Regulation 19 (1) (2) (3))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the regulator is notified in a timely manner of significant events. Also, that consultation with the LADO is well recorded and if they are not consulted, a clear rationale is recorded for this decision.</p>	<p>14 April 2023</p>
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Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure the prospective adopters are helped to fully understand the child’s background, health, emotional and developmental needs, and the practical implications for parenting that child, with a clear and consistent approach to life appreciation days. (Adoption: national minimum standards 13.7)
- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children are taken into account by the adoption agency and adoption support agency in monitoring and developing its service. (Adoption: national minimum standards 1.6)

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 Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

Voluntary adoption agency details

Unique reference number: 1183499

Registered provider: Slough Children First Limited

Registered provider address: Observatory House, 25 Windsor Road, Slough SL1 2EL

Responsible individual: Saima Arif

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Inspectors

Katie Ratcliffe, Social Care Inspector

Skye Frain, Social Care Inspector

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