

Evergreen Foster Care Service

Bluebell School, Gloucester Road, Kidsgrove, Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire ST7 1EH

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

A small private company owns this independent fostering agency. Ofsted registered the agency in November 2019. The agency offers planned placements for children requiring high levels of support with moving from residential care into foster care.

The registered manager has a level 5 qualification in leadership and management.

At the time of this assurance visit, there are six fostering households caring for two children.

Visit dates: 24 to 25 November 2020

Previous inspection date: Not previously inspected

Previous inspection judgement: Not previously inspected

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

Children benefit from carefully planned moves into foster care.

Children get to know their foster carers while still living in their residential home. This helps to reassure children and encourages them to build relationships before moving in to their new home.

Children continue to attend their school. The provider encourages foster carers to meet care staff and share information with teachers. While doing this, foster carers learn strategies that are effective in managing children's behaviour. Children receive consistent and joined-up care and, as a result, are making good progress.

Foster carers provide improved care to children by accessing specialist support. Children and their foster carers attend regular therapeutic sessions. Foster carers have a developing understanding of children's developmental and psychological needs.

The provider consults with children and considers their wishes, such as being the only child in the foster home or having a pet. They identify foster carers who are the best match for children. Children enjoy spending time with their foster carers and walking their dogs together. While some activities are restricted due to COVID-19, one fostering household has encouraged their child to take part in a weekly virtual quiz. This helps the child to meet the foster carers' family while visits to the home are not taking place.

Children continue to stay in touch with their families. Where possible, foster carers promote calls and visits with families and friends. This allows children to feel secure with people who are important to them as well as including them in their new home.

The safety of children

Foster carers keep children safe. The provider completes robust assessments of potential foster carers. This ensures that foster carers have the appropriate integrity, skills and home to safeguard children. The approval process validates the provider's assessment of potential foster carers.

Foster carers receive training in areas relevant to the children they are caring for, such as autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder and behaviour management, including de-escalation techniques. They meet regularly to review progress with the provider. This ensures the provider can address training

needs promptly, such as effective recording to evidence their decision-making and actions.

Children have care plans and risk assessments. Some local authority care plans require updating to reflect a child's progress from residential to foster care. Although foster carers receive high levels of support, the provider does not always capture behaviour management strategies adequately on care plans. This means that some carers do not have the guidance to proactively manage their child's behaviour.

When foster carers have sought support, the provider has responded immediately. This has diffused the situation and kept the child safe. Foster carers learn from these incidents and adapt their care to maintain children's engagement. This helps children to regulate their emotions and behaviour.

Leaders and managers

Foster carers like the provider's model of care. Foster carers state that the provider knows the children well and moves are generally at the child's pace. There is always ongoing support from the residential home and school. The provider has built regular respite into the care model. Each child has an allocated respite carer who attends introductory and care planning meetings alongside the main carer. This provides continuity of care to prevent children's placements breaking down.

Carers speak highly of the supervising social worker. They felt supported by her during the assessment process, and post-approval she continues to communicate well with them. Carers describe a positive fostering panel experience. There have been face-to-face fostering panel meetings when COVID-19 guidance has allowed. The panel chair encourages panel members to consider strengths and vulnerabilities for all applicants. One foster carer with previous fostering experience stated, 'Panel was welcoming and thorough. An effective process.'

The provider facilitates good training to carers through connect sessions, which provide training and therapeutic input. Carers have attended some direct training. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the provider also delivers sessions virtually. The provider has provided some introductory training to panel members, who have also been invited to attend foster-carer training.

Foster carers receive good support. Professionals who know both the foster carers and the children provide out of hours support. Foster carers feel empowered to care for children and, with guidance, resolve issues at the earliest opportunity. This keeps them and children safe. Foster carers have also developed their own network using social media. This provides more informal support and information sharing.

However, foster carers have not yet received supervision from their supervising social worker. Newly approved carers have not had the opportunity to individually explore how they are working to the policies and guidance of the fostering service or how their competencies and skills are developing.

Not all carers are aware of the provider's payment policy. As a result, some carers feel uncertain and confused about what fees they will receive and what allowances they can claim when they have children in their care.

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

Recommendations

- The fostering service provider should ensure each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 13, 3.9)
- The fostering service provider should ensure each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 43, paragraph 21.8)
- The fostering service provider should provide a written policy and the current level of payments annually to each foster carer and commissioners of the service. The foster carer receives clear information about the allowances and expenses payable, and how to access them, before a child is placed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 55, paragraph 28.6)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2509056

Registered provider: Evergreen Foster Care Limited

Registered provider address: C/o Bluebell School Limited, Gloucester Road, Kidsgrove, Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire ST7 1EH

Responsible individual: Sarah Deaville

Registered manager: Clare Ratcliffe

Inspectors

Joanna Warburton, Social Care Inspector
Gareth Leckey, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020