

Slough Children First

Slough Children First Limited

Observatory House, 25 Windsor Road, Slough SL1 2EL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Slough Children First is an independent, not-for-profit, wholly owned company that provides social care and support services to children, young people and families. The fostering service offers placements to children from Slough. The agency currently supports 47 fostering households that are providing care for 52 children and young people.

There has been no registered manager since 30 September 2024.

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 March 2025

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: 5 July 2021

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 live with foster carers with whom they build secure, warm and trusting relationships. They experience a sense of permanence and belonging. Foster carers know the children well and work with the service to provide good care and support. They show a strong commitment to the continued growth and development of the children.

Foster carers have a good understanding of children's health needs, and they are effective in ensuring that these needs are met. The foster carers work with a range of health professionals to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. They work collaboratively with physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and play therapists. The new organisational commitment to therapeutic parenting enables foster carers to learn more about the impact of trauma and the importance of attachments to trusted individuals.

Foster carers show a strong commitment to the education of the children in their care. They work with social workers and the virtual school to ensure the best possible experience for children. Foster carers are ambitious for the children's education. For example, one carer is supporting their young person with a university application. They have also arranged work experience. Another carer is a strong advocate for the educational needs of the child in their care; they work with the school and have daily communication with them. Because of this commitment to their education, children know that foster carers value them and want the best for them.

Children have life experiences similar to other children of the same age. Foster carers encourage and support them with developing their own interests and hobbies. One child is part of the local football club. Another attends the gym to keep fit, and their foster carer also supports them with their love of cooking. Another child plays badminton and is conscious of keeping fit in preparation for joining a uniformed service. One child is learning to drive.

Children feel part of the family, and foster carers treat them as such. Foster carers take them on holiday, and the children speak positively about this. One child said, 'I was placed in an environment where I thrive and live a full life.' Another said, 'They treat me like their own, and I like that.'

The community model of support operated by the service is a particular strength. It gives children a wider social life and enables them to build friendships and close connections. Foster carers say that it is like an extended family. Additionally, the model supports improved placement stability and outcomes.

The service provides children with opportunities to express their views, wishes and feelings. They contribute to the development of the service. They are engaged. The service involves children in the interview process of new staff, and they influence the

outcome. The children have also developed a Slough logo and slogan. This helps children to feel involved and shows that the service values their ideas.

The service works to recruit a diverse range of carers to meet the needs of Slough children. The new recruitment and marketing officer is passionate about the task. They show strong commitment to ensuring an improved and varied rate of applications.

The fostering panel works well. It uses an effective process to ensure that it makes well-balanced recommendations. This also ensures that it has the most suitable foster carers to meet the needs of children. The panel chair is meticulous and knowledgeable. This has helped to develop an effective panel.

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

Children are protected well in this service. They do not go missing from home, and they receive care from well-matched foster carers. Incidents of exploitation are low, as are incidents of self-harm. One child said, 'I feel safe here with "aunty" and her family.' Another child said, 'If there is anything worrying me, I take it to "aunty", and she will sort it.'

Children are helped to have positive, memorable experiences. They are able to take measured risks because they have the support of confident foster carers. For example, one child is now able to walk home from school with a friend when this had previously not been possible. The foster carers have helped to build her confidence. Risk assessments are of a good standard and updated regularly. Staff identify risks and needs from the matching stage. This continues throughout the time the child lives with the carer.

Effective safeguarding practices are in place. Foster carers are well supported by staff, and children are equally well supported by their carers. There is good multi-agency working to achieve the best possible outcome for children. Notifications of any serious incidents are sent to Ofsted in a timely way.

Medication for children with complex needs is well managed by carers. The administration of this medication is well recorded. Foster carers receive bespoke training to help them to care for children with complex needs.

Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding. Foster carers and staff receive mandatory safeguarding training, although four carers have safeguarding training that is overdue.

Safer recruitment processes are good. This helps to ensure that children are not cared for by unsuitable individuals.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are ambitious for the children and have high expectations for what children can achieve. They are aspirational and model this to staff and carers. Because of this, the children are also aspirational. Some of the children who spoke to inspectors have decided which career path they wish to take. They set goals and are working towards achieving these.

There has been no registered manager since September 2024. However, leaders have worked diligently to recruit interim managers to ensure that the service has had effective managerial support. The current manager took up their post in February of this year, and they are in the process of submitting an application to register.

Foster carers receive an effective level of support to help them provide good care to children. It is evident that the children make excellent progress and have good experiences. Leaders and managers know the progress that children make. There is evidence of meaningful discussion about children in staff supervision.

Staff are positive about the support that they receive. There is a good training offer from different sources. Leaders and managers encourage staff to progress to senior positions, and they provide the relevant training for this. Staff receive regular supervision, which is of a good standard.

Managers have good relationships with other professionals. They work to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. Managers work well together in the interests of the children. Regular meetings enable them to reflect on areas of limitation and put plans in place to address these areas.

There is a clear commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. The carer cohort is diverse, and the service supports them well, for example with their communication needs when English is not their first language. Also, they mark religious and cultural festivals with gifts and events.

The quality of the review reports has been satisfactory, but leaders and managers have not been consistent in providing these reviews to Ofsted within reasonable timescales. The lateness has meant that Ofsted has not had a consistent overview of the service.

Foster carers are positive about the training that they receive, and they appreciate the quality. However, there is mandatory training that some carers have not completed, and some have training that has expired. Additionally, two sets of carers have not completed their training, support and development standards within the required timescales. Action is already being taken to ensure training compliance.

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, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all foster carers complete mandatory training within relevant timescales.</p>	30 April 2025
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2))</p>	30 April 2025

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the training, support and development standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.3)

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: 1183495

Registered provider: Slough Children First Limited

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

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Inspectors

Vevene Muhammad, Social Care Inspector

Miquette Novella, Social Care Inspector

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