

The Children's Family Trust

Hanbury Court, Harris Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove,
Worcestershire B60 4DJ

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is part of a national charity. It provides a range of fostering services, including long- and short-term care, respite care, and parent and baby placements.

A new manager has been appointed. He has submitted his application to Ofsted to become the registered manager.

Visit dates: 16 to 17 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 13 August 2018

Previous inspection judgement: Good

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

Foster carers build positive and nurturing relationships with children and consider them as part of their family. As a result, children settle quickly and feel safe and secure.

Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, children have regular opportunities to spend time with people who matter the most to them. Foster carers develop strong relationships with children's family members. They invite them to their home and organise regular telephone and video calls. This helps children to feel secure and maintain important family relationships.

Foster carers and supervising social workers use a variety of methods to regularly seek children's views. This includes regular consultation during home visits and providing children with a communication app to express their views and feelings. This proactive ethos helps children to take ownership of their care and feel valued.

Children's health needs are understood and promoted. Foster carers ensure that children register with universal health services as quickly as possible. When required, foster carers and supervising social workers seek specialist health support to meet children's needs.

Foster carers prioritise children's education. They continue to provide children with home learning when they cannot attend school due to COVID-19 restrictions. They work closely with teachers to provide children with consistent care. Recently, a child became increasingly anxious and unsettled at school. The foster carer, teachers and the child's social worker worked together to create a bespoke support plan. As a result, the child settled and re-engaged in his education.

Foster carers, supervising social workers and managers have been creative and imaginative during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that they continue to engage with children. For example, they have organised activities and events throughout the year.

The safety of children

Foster carers identify and understand the risks for each child. Individualised and up-to-date risk assessments contain clear guidance for foster carers to manage risk. The manager closely scrutinises children's risk-management plans to assess their effectiveness. When necessary, he organises multi-agency meetings to discuss risks and embed plans to keep children safe.

Recently, a child displayed a range of challenging and risk-taking behaviours. The manager provided a robust and proactive response to manage these risks. He worked closely with the child's local authority and the police to put safety plans in place.

Foster carers receive high levels of support and supervision when children become unsettled and display risk-taking behaviours. They benefit from safeguarding and behaviour-management training. This robust and supportive approach provides foster carers with the confidence and skills to manage challenging incidents. A foster carer told the inspector, 'I cannot fault them [fostering agency]. They are there for us when we need them.'

Recently, one child went missing from his foster home on a number of occasions. The foster carer provided a proactive and robust response to keep the child safe. For example, they visited areas and addresses that the child was known to frequently visit. The foster carers and manager worked closely with the police to return the child safely.

Leaders and managers

The manager and supervising social workers provide foster carers with good-quality support and advice. Overall, staff feel supported by the manager and senior leaders. The manager is aspirational, child focused and ambitious for the children in the agency's care. He uses his sound knowledge of the sector to continue developing the service.

Managers have embedded the amended fostering regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a combination of virtual and face-to-face assessment and supervision arrangements. This has ensured that the agency's operations have been sustained.

Staff develop excellent working relationships with a number of agencies. This coordinated approach supports children to make good progress. Professionals are highly complimentary about the agency and their proactive and innovative approach. A teacher told the inspector, 'The child's foster carer is really proactive; she is determined to get the best for him. She is the best foster carer I've worked with. Together we are doing everything we can for the child.'

The manager and senior leaders continue to develop the staff training programme. This will provide staff with a range of face-to-face and online training. The manager has a plan for the further development of the workforce. However, despite this progress, some gaps in foster carer training remain. As a result, this requirement is repeated.

The fostering panel has operated remotely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There is good communication between the panel and the agency. Panel reports are timely and of a high quality. Foster carers describe a positive fostering panel

experience. Overall, the fostering panel promotes safe, secure and stable placements.

The manager has worked hard to address some of the requirements and recommendations identified at the previous inspection. For example, he ensures that all relevant information about children is known in a timely manner. In addition, staff recruitment is safe and robust. Furthermore, the manager and senior leaders have improved the quality of children’s records. For example, matching documents are detailed and clearly outline why placements are deemed appropriate.

However, the manager has not notified Ofsted about all serious incidents. This prevents the regulator from having adequate oversight of the agency. In addition, the agency does not complete a review of the quality of care at appropriate intervals. This is a further missed opportunity for the regulator to provide additional scrutiny and oversight of care. As a result, both of these requirements are repeated.

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

Requirement	Due date
Provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))	15/12/21
Ensure that there is a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals; and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster carers, and their placing authorities. (Regulations 35 (1)(b) (3))	15/02/21
Ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must, without delay, notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))	15/02/21

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC034804

Registered provider: The Children's Family Trust

Responsible individual: Marina Mulholland

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Gareth Leckey, Social Care Inspector
Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector

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Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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