

Cfs Care Limited

The Vicarage, 93 Bradford Street, Farnworth, Bolton, Lancashire BL4 9JY

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned fostering agency was registered with Ofsted in November 2018.

The agency offers a range of foster placements, including permanent, long-term, short-term, parent and child, emergency and respite. At the time of this visit, the agency had 12 fostering households who are caring for nine children.

The registered manager left the agency in December 2019. There was no registered manager at the time of this inspection.

Visit dates: 3 to 4 March 2021

Previous inspection date: 14 October 2019

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

The agency has grown since the last inspection. These new carers are offered good-quality support by experienced social workers. Children access specialist therapeutic services provided by the agency. These additional services are attractive to new carers. Some foster carers have transferred into the agency with children already in placement. These carers feel well supported. Foster carers trust the agency to do what they say they are going to do. Foster carers have confidence that there is always someone at the end of the phone. This helps carers to have the advice they need to deliver good-quality care to the children.

Children are warmly welcomed by their foster carers and are quickly made to feel part of the family. Children are supported to pursue their interests and talents. One child has her own horse, purchased by her foster carers. Children are helped to attend clubs and activities. This broadens children's experiences and develops their self-confidence.

Carers have managed the impact of COVID-19 well. Children are supported to keep in touch with their families. Some foster carers help children to remain connected to people who are important to them by supervising contact with family members. When face-to-face contact has been prevented during the pandemic, children are able to access virtual technology to communicate with their families as set out in the children's plans.

Foster carers promote children's education needs. During periods of lockdown, children receive good help with completing online lessons. Some children have been helped to safely continue to attend school. Good support with accessing learning opportunities means that children fulfil their educational potential.

Children have access to therapy provided by the agency. This has a positive impact on children's progress and well-being. Children receive good support to build positive and trusting relationships with their foster carers. As specialist support is commissioned by the agency, children are able to quickly access the help they need. Help for children to work through their past trauma prevents placements from breaking down.

There have been issues with two carers, but these carers were placed on hold while concerns were investigated. Other placements are going very well. Social workers gave positive feedback about the agency and the quality of care provided to the children.

Carers and staff are aware of the aims of the service. However, a copy of the statement of purpose was not sent to Ofsted in line with regulations. Some information in the document provided to inspectors during the assurance visit was out of date and did not accurately reflect the current aims of the service.

The safety of children

Staff guide carers in the steps they should take to manage risks. Risk assessments and behaviour management plans are regularly updated. Carers understand who to contact if they are worried about the safety and well-being of a child. There is an effective out-of-hours service staffed by qualified social workers.

Relationships between foster carers and their social workers are positive. Staff and carers work together to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children. Foster carers feel valued and advocate on behalf of the children. The small number of fostering households means that supervising social workers get to know the carers and the children well. Carers feel confident asking for support and guidance. Positive relationships between foster carers and supervising social workers help to keep children safe.

Children rarely go missing. Most children are settled in their foster placements. Guidance is provided about what to do if a child goes missing. Requests are made to the child's relevant authority for return home interviews. However, the outcome of these meetings is not clearly documented on children's files, nor is it evident on some children's files whether a return home interview took place. Not clearly recording the outcome of return home interviews prevents learning from these discussions with children, which would inform risk management.

There are good working relationships between the agency, local authorities and professionals, who work together in the best interests of the children. Safeguarding concerns are shared with the designated officer in accordance with local safeguarding procedures. Managers are committed to undertaking comprehensive reviews following incidents and demonstrate a commitment to best practice.

Foster carers receive regular supervision from suitably qualified social workers. During the lockdown period, supervising social workers have adapted their ways of working to enable virtual supervisions to take place. When there are concerns about foster carers' practice, the agency provides advice and guidance. However, foster carers' supervision records do not consistently demonstrate that concerns about carer practice have been raised and addressed during these meetings. A failure to document practice concerns in foster carers' supervision records does not provide an accurate account of what actions have been agreed and prevents robust oversight of these arrangements.

Matching processes have been reviewed. Consideration is given to the individual needs of children and the skills of the foster carers. However, sometimes inexperienced carers are asked to care for children who have issues that are beyond

their level of experience and ability. In some cases, this has led to placements ending prematurely.

There is a wide selection of suitable training available to foster carers. Additional training is accessed via a therapeutic training hub. Online training means that carers can benefit from this resource while group training has been suspended. In one case, a carer had not received safeguarding training while she was caring for a child who had a history of risk-taking behaviours, missing episodes and self-harm. Although the agency had identified at the point of placement the gaps in the carer's knowledge and experience, efforts to support the carer to complete the relevant training were not effective. This meant that the carer may not have been able to identify and respond to risks effectively.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager left the service in December 2019. A new manager left before registering with Ofsted. Another manager also left the agency before applying to register. At the time of the assurance visit, the service did not have a manager. An interim manager is joining the agency until a new permanent manager is recruited. There have been inconsistencies in the management of the service, but things are getting better. Carers said that they are aware of the changes in management but that they do not feel it has had a negative impact on them.

Senior leaders commissioned an independent audit of the service, and an action plan is in place. It was too soon to measure the impact of this assessment at the time of this visit. Leaders demonstrate a commitment to improving practice and strive to provide good-quality care.

The agency has its own panel. Panel members are suitably appraised. The panel is made up of members with a broad range of backgrounds and experiences. Matters of diversity have suitably been taken into consideration in the composition of panel membership. In one case, the agency decision-maker recommended that a carer should be returned to panel before a change in their approval. However, this did not happen. A report presented to panel did not cover some important areas, including a review of the suitability of the accommodation or training. The change of approval went ahead without panel being presented with full information. This could lead to a child receiving care that does not meet their individual needs.

A requirement raised at the last inspection in relation to safe recruitment has been met. The recommendation regarding matching has been repeated. A recommendation regarding reviewing children's care plans was not fully looked at during this visit. Therefore, this will be raised again to be reviewed at the next full inspection.

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
<p>The fostering service provider must compile a written statement in relation to the fostering service ('the statement of purpose') which consists of—</p> <p>a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service—</p> <p>and,</p> <p>a statement as to the services and facilities (including any parent and child arrangements) provided by the fostering service.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the children's guide to the Chief Inspector, to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child's age and understanding).</p> <p>Subject to paragraph (6), the fostering service provider must ensure that the fostering service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 3 (1)(a)(b) (4) (5))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that Ofsted is provided with a copy of the statement of purpose and that information provided in the document accurately reflects the aims and objectives of the service.</p>	<p>9 April 2021</p>
<p>A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 28 (2))</p> <p>In particular, if the agency decision-maker recommends a carer be returned to panel prior to a change of approval,</p>	<p>9 April 2021</p>

ensure that a full and detailed report is completed and presented to panel before any change in approval is agreed.	
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Recommendations

- The responsible person should ensure that carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. In particular, ensure foster carers complete relevant training. If foster carers face barriers to completing training, the agency should work with the carer to overcome these barriers without delay. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’ 3.8)
- The responsible person should only suggest foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child’s assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’ 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service contacts the responsible authority to request statutory reviews or visits if these are overdue for any child, or if a review has not already been arranged by the responsible authority and a change in the care plan is needed, there has been a significant change in arrangements for the child’s care or a major action (e.g. a change of placement) which is not in the care plan appears likely. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’ 31.6)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2503134

Registered provider: Cfs Care Limited

Registered provider address: Floor 5, 196 Deansgate, Manchester, Lancashire
M3 3WF

Responsible individual: Daryl Holkham

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Angela Weston, Social Care Inspector
Clive Lucas, Social Care Inspector

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