

# Evergreen Foster Care Service

Evergreen Foster Care Limited

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

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## 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.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 24 and 25 November 2020 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

### Inspection dates: 11 to 15 October 2021

**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:** not previously inspected

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** not applicable

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children settle quickly in their placements and form strong and trusted relationships with their foster carers. Children feel loved, respected and listened to. Some children refer to their foster carers as 'Mum' and 'Dad'. Children are warmly welcomed into the immediate and extended family. This helps children to develop a sense of belonging and positive self-worth. A child told the inspector: 'My foster carer is really kind. I really like my home. I know that I am safe and that this is my home always. I'd score it 10 out of 10.'

A therapist is employed by the agency. They work closely with foster carers to ensure that they understand children's needs and provide appropriate and effective care. For example, the therapist, registered manager and foster carers regularly track children's progress and set targets in line with their needs. This specialist oversight means that children receive good-quality and well-informed care. As a result, children make progress in a range of areas.

Children make strong progress in their education. Some children also attend one of the provider's schools. The registered manager and supervising social workers use these existing school relationships to share strategies with foster carers. As a result, children receive joined-up and consistent care. A teacher told the inspector: 'Our school has built a very positive relationship with the agency. Their understanding of the school model and how this feeds through into the home environment ensures children have a consistent approach.'

Staff and foster carers understand the importance of children spending time with family and friends. Children also establish new relationships and friendships through birthday parties, school, clubs, social activities and hobbies.

Children live healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that there is good promotion of their physical, emotional and social well-being. Children have timely access to primary healthcare services, and they receive advice and support from specialist services when appropriate.

Foster carers enthusiastically support children to engage in a range of positive social and recreational activities. These include trips to the theatre or encouraging children to join local clubs. The achievements of children are celebrated. Key events are recognised and promoted by their carers and the agency. For example, foster carers collate memory books which capture special memories and occasions.

Children have regular opportunities to express their views about the quality of care they receive. The agency offers each child external advocacy support. Furthermore, children are heavily involved in more complex aspects of their care. For example, staff support children to create their own behaviour support plans. This child-centred approach helps children to develop a sense of ownership of their plans.

Overall, foster carers are sufficiently prepared to care for children. The registered manager and staff work hard to gather all known information about children's needs. They meet with a range of professionals to scrutinise this information and formulate care plans. Children benefit from well-planned and individualised transitions. For example, a foster carer sent a child a video recording of the foster home environment to alleviate the child's anxiety. However, on one occasion, a child's plans did not contain information about her challenging behaviour. This recording shortfall had the potential to undermine the stability of the child's placement.

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

Children are protected from harm and abuse. Staff and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children are paramount. Individualised and up-to-date risk assessments contain clear guidance for foster carers to manage risk. In addition, foster carers use individualised approaches to help children feel safe and settled. For example, a foster carer created a 'retreat' space in a child's bedroom to support the child to settle when they felt anxious.

Foster carers are well prepared and able to manage complex behaviour. For example, they promote positive behaviour using reward charts and certificates. This helps children to understand and manage their behaviours well.

Children make good and sustained progress in reducing their challenging behaviours. They do not go missing from their foster homes and incidents of challenging behaviours continue to reduce over time. For example, one child has not been restrained for several months; this is significant progress for this child. Foster carers also provide children with high levels of nurture alongside consistent structure and routine. They know children well and use their intuition to understand when children feel unsettled. This proactive and child-centred approach helps children to feel safe.

The agency has strong and effective working partnerships with other professionals. These include children's social workers, teachers and health professionals. This successful collaboration promotes an effective, coordinated approach to safeguarding children.

Foster carers are provided with a broad range of comprehensive training to ensure that children are protected. For example, foster carers' training covers a range of subjects, including behaviour management, internet safety and child exploitation. This variety of training provides foster carers with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage risks.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure. Staff routinely conduct checks that ensure that homes are well maintained and comfortable and that there are no health and safety concerns. Where safety issues arise, staff and managers take effective action to resolve them.

The agency has robust and safe recruitment processes in place. Successful candidates have their background information scrutinised and verified prior to their

appointment. This includes appropriate checks for those staff who have worked overseas. These robust systems mean that children are not exposed to unsafe adults.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The registered manager has continued to embed her vision and improve the quality of the service since its registration. She is ambitious and child-centred and aspires to provide children with high-quality care. The registered manager has effective monitoring systems in place. She carries out frequent quality assurance activities and closely tracks the progress of children. In addition, the supervising social workers know children well and speak knowledgeably about their needs and progress.

Most foster carers feel that the support they receive is very effective. However, a minority of carers identified support as an area for improvement. For example, the agency does not currently have an adequate level of respite carers. This means that foster carers are not provided with the agreed levels of respite. For some foster carers, this has created a sense of frustration towards the agency. The registered manager acknowledges this shortfall and is currently recruiting a larger pool of respite carers to meet the demands of the agency.

Overall, foster carers and staff benefit from good-quality support and guidance from the registered manager and therapists. Foster carers complete the training, support and development standards within the 12-month time frame following their initial approval. The agency uses regular online forums to support foster carers to reflect on their practice and enhance their learning. In addition, foster carers have access to an extensive training programme. As a result, children receive good-quality and well-informed care. However, some foster carers told the inspector that they experience significant difficulties using the agency's electronic recording system. The registered manager acknowledges this issue and plans to provide foster carers with a bespoke training package.

The agency's fostering panel operates effectively. Its membership is drawn from a range of relevant professional backgrounds. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work that is presented at panel meetings. The quality of foster carers' assessments presented at the panel is of a high standard.

The registered manager and staff work well with a range of partner agencies. They act as a strong advocate for children and have a clear understanding of children's plans. However, in some instances, children's plans did not consistently reflect their needs. In addition, some local authority children's plans are out of date and therefore do not reflect children's progress. These recording shortfalls do not affect the quality of care children receive.

Staff benefit from a healthy learning environment. Discussions in supervision sessions and staff forums strike a healthy balance between effective challenge and support. Training programmes mirror children's individual, and often complex, needs.

Detailed supervision records reflect children's experiences and progress. As a result, practice continues to evolve and develop over time.

## 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 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>This specifically relates to providing foster carers with the agreed level of respite care.</p> | 6 December 2021 |

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers have full written information about the child's needs prior to their admission. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 31, paragraph 14.8)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers receive appropriate training to assist them in using electronic recording systems. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 41, paragraph 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure that children's plans consistently capture their needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that children's files contain their updated local authority plans. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 53, paragraph 26.8)

### 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:** 2509056

**Registered provider:** Evergreen Foster Care Limited

**Registered provider address:** Bluebell School Limited, Gloucester Road, Kids Grove, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST7 1EH

**Responsible individual:** Sarah Deaville

**Registered manager:** Clare Ratcliffe

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## **Inspector**

Gareth Leckey, Social Care Inspector

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