

Clover Fostering

Clover Fostering

Regus, 6-9 The Square, Stockley Park, Uxbridge UB11 1FW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Clover Fostering is a privately owned independent fostering agency. The agency and the manager registered with Ofsted on 3 March 2024. The agency provides emergency, respite, bridging, short-term and long-term placements, and placements where siblings can live together.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency had three fostering households providing care to three children. One young person had remained living with foster carers on a 'staying put' arrangement. All children placed with the fostering agency were unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

There is a permanent registered manager in post, who is currently undertaking a management qualification that is relevant to her role and remains within the regulatory timescales to complete this.

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 March 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

This inspection identified significant and widespread shortfalls in the operation of this independent fostering agency, resulting in a judgement of inadequate.

Managers and staff do not have effective oversight of children's care. A reliance on virtual meetings means that staff do not regularly visit foster carers' homes in line with the agency policy. The registered manager could not evidence that children placed within the fostering agency had been visited in placement by the agency's social work staff since July 2023. This prevents staff from monitoring the care and safety of children placed with the fostering agency.

Managers and staff do not know children well. Staff are not able to talk about children's care, their needs, or their progress. Staff do not routinely support foster carers to attend meetings about children, and records of children's care are incomplete. One foster carer said that it was 'embarrassing' that children's professionals could attend meetings in their home, but staff from the fostering agency would only join online.

This lack of understanding of children is compounded by an absence of information about children's care plans. Where information is missing, managers and staff have failed to escalate these omissions. This failure to act means that managers and staff are not clear how foster carers should respond to the individual needs of children in their care.

All the children placed with the agency are unaccompanied children who are seeking asylum. Their first language is not English. Despite this, there are no independent arrangements to enable staff to communicate with children in their first language, either verbally or in writing, about their plans, or the quality of their care. This leaves children vulnerable, as they have no systems to help them to independently communicate their day-to-day experiences.

Processes for the assessment of the suitability of prospective foster carers do not meet regulatory requirements. Social workers begin assessing applicants before managers accept an application from the prospective foster carer. When foster carers transfer from another fostering service, assessing social workers lack professional curiosity and due diligence in reviewing and updating assessment information. This means that the assessments presented to the fostering panel are out of date and incomplete.

Foster carers do not consistently attend the required training and do not all routinely maintain records of children's placements. Supervision meetings fail to address these fundamental omissions. These areas of concern do not inform planning for children's

care. For example, foster carers have been approved to care for more children, and decisions for a child's long-term care were supported despite these concerns being known by staff and managers. This decision-making fails to promote the provision of safe, high-quality foster care for children.

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

Managers have failed to ensure that the safeguarding of children is prioritised. As a result, children are at risk of harm.

Managers and staff respond poorly to new or emerging concerns in foster placements. For example, when a foster carer reported their observation that a child had a suspicious substance in their home, the supervising social worker failed to recognise this as a risk to the child or others in the household. As a result, no risk management strategies were put in place to support and inform foster carers. This lack of understanding of risk fails to prioritise the safety of children.

There are no risk assessments or safe care plans in place for the children placed with the fostering agency. This significant shortfall leaves foster carers without key information and strategies to enable them to safeguard children in their care.

Managers and staff have failed to take timely action to implement the necessary checks when adults not known to the agency move into foster homes. On one occasion, three children were removed from the care of the agency when local authority social workers found that the children had been left in the care of an unchecked adult. In this situation, there was no visit to this foster home by a social worker from the agency for six days.

Arrangements for unannounced visits to foster carers' homes do not safeguard children. Visits usually take place when children are at school. When visits identify concerns, there are delays in following these up. For example, at an unannounced visit to a foster home in October 2023, the supervising social worker identified concerns about the conditions in the home and an unknown adult who appeared to be living there. Despite this, a further unannounced visit was not undertaken until January 2024.

Managers do not have robust recruitment processes that minimise risk to children. Staff begin working for the fostering agency without full information being available to assure managers of their suitability to work with children. In addition, staff are employed in social work roles despite not being registered to practice as a social worker.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Inspectors identified significant and widespread concerns about the management of the fostering service. The oversight of the responsible individual and the registered manager is ineffective.

The responsible individual lacks the knowledge and experience to provide the level of oversight expected in his role. He does not demonstrate that he understands the regulations that govern the provision of a fostering service. He does not show that he understands the significance of safeguarding. He demonstrates a lack of professional boundaries with children and foster carers.

Managers do not ensure that the agency has enough staff in post to operate in line with regulations. During the inspection, the registered manager told inspectors that the agency is unable to function as there are insufficient staff to fulfil key social work and regulatory functions. The agency does not have an agency decision-maker. The registered manager and the only supervising social worker employed by the fostering agency both resigned during the inspection. The lack of key staff impacts the ability of the service to respond to the shortfalls identified in the inspection.

There is a systemic lack of professional challenge at all levels of the agency.

Managers do not take action to challenge significant shortfalls in social work practice. In particular, managers do not report concerns about practice that may place children at risk to statutory colleagues, Ofsted, or professional registering bodies.

The panel does not fulfil their quality assurance function. When there are concerns about the quality and content of assessments the panel does not sufficiently escalate their concerns. This is compounded by a lack of due diligence from the agency decision-maker when reaching their decision.

There is an absence of induction, supervision, and training for staff at all levels of the fostering agency. These shortfalls leave staff without the necessary support and development that they require for their specialist roles.

Managers do not have systems in place to ensure that the quality of records held by the fostering agency is sufficient. For example, information is copied in individual case records and in the agency decision-maker process. The foster carer handbook contains multiple references to another fostering agency. There is a lack of essential, clear information for foster carers relating to key areas. For example, foster carers do not receive written confirmation of their approval as foster carers. As a result of a lack of management oversight, records are chaotic and cannot be relied on.

Managers do not operate the agency in line with the statement of purpose. All children placed with the fostering agency are unaccompanied children who are seeking asylum. Despite this, the statement of purpose does not reflect this. In addition, managers do not provide foster carers with specific training, resources or guidance to enable them to understand and respond to the specific needs of this particular group of children.

As a result of this inspection, enforcement action has been taken and the fostering agency is suspended. Ofsted has requested that the responsible individual discloses

the agency's financial information. This is to assure Ofsted of the financial arrangements for the organisation.

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
The fostering service provider must— keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide; notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days; and if the children's guide is revised, supply a copy 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). (Regulation 4 (a)(b)(c)) In particular, ensure that the statement of purpose reflects the services that the fostering agency provides, and, when this is updated, a copy is supplied to the chief inspector within 28 days. In particular, ensure that the children's guide is accessible to the children placed with the fostering agency.	17 May 2024
The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to— the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency; and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency;	17 May 2024

carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(b)) In particular, ensure that where concerns are raised regarding social work practice, these are managed, reported and escalated to relevant registration bodies. In particular, ensure that staff of the fostering agency engage with planning processes, reviews, and arrangements for children alongside foster carers and other professionals, retaining oversight of children's plans and care. In particular, ensure that the records of the agency are individual, do not use cut and paste, do not reflect other fostering agencies, and provide evidence of individualised decision-making. In particular, ensure that the arrangements for the care of children reflect their individual needs, enabling children to understand the decisions impacting their day-to-day lives and to independently give feedback on the care that they receive.	
The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)) In particular, ensure that agency practice is delivered in a way that provides oversight of the safety of, and the quality of, care provided to children placed with foster carers. This includes regular visits by social work staff to foster homes and regular meetings with all household members. Also, ensure the effective use of unannounced visits to understand the child's day-to-day experiences. In particular, ensure that individual risk assessments and safe care plans are in place to inform the care of all children placed.	17 May 2024
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.	17 May 2024

The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (1) (3)) In particular, ensure that foster carers are provided with and supported to engage in training that is relevant to their role and the individual needs of the children in their care. In particular, ensure that foster carers are provided with all necessary information to enable them to provide individualised care to children, in line with their current plans.	
The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to— the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it; and the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19 (a)(b)) In particular, ensure that there are sufficient staff, including qualified and registered social workers, for the fostering agency to operate in line with regulations and guidance.	17 May 2024
The fostering service provider must not— employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so; or allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so. This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service.	17 May 2024

For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person— is of integrity and good character; has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform; is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform; and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. The fostering service provider must take reasonable steps to ensure that any person working for a fostering service who is not employed by the fostering service, and to whom paragraph (2) does not apply, is appropriately supervised while carrying out their duties. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(b)(c) (4)) In particular, ensure that agency recruitment processes adhere to this regulation. In particular, ensure that only staff who are qualified and registered to practice as a social worker are employed in posts designated for social workers. In particular, ensure that all staff receive supervision from a suitably qualified individual, including the registered manager. In particular, ensure that all staff receive an annual appraisal of their performance. In particular, ensure that suitable training is made available for all staff that is relevant to their roles and the service that is delivered by the fostering agency.	
The functions of the fostering panel in respect of cases referred to it by the fostering service provider are— to consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent; where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given;	17 May 2024

to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parent, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate—

on the first review carried out in accordance with regulation 28(2); and

on the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service provider in accordance with regulation 28(5); and

to consider any case referred to it under regulation 27(9) or 28(10).

In considering what recommendation to make under paragraph (1), the fostering panel—

must consider and take into account all of the information passed to it in accordance with regulation 26, 27 or 28 (as the case may be);

may request the fostering service provider to obtain any other relevant information or to provide such other assistance as the fostering panel considers necessary.

In relation to the case of a person in respect of whom a report has been prepared in accordance with regulation 26(3), the fostering panel must either—

request the fostering service provider to prepare a further written report, covering all the matters set out in regulation 26(2)(c); or

recommend that the person is not suitable to be a foster parent.

Inserted by Reg 12 of the Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015.

The fostering service provider must obtain such information as the fostering panel considers necessary and send that information to the panel, and provide such other assistance as the fostering panel may request, so far as is reasonably practicable.

The fostering panel must also—

advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with regulation 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness; oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider; and give advice, and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it. In this regulation "recommend" means recommend to the fostering service provider. (Regulation 25 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(b)(c) (3) (4)(a)(b)(c) (5)) In particular, ensure that the fostering agency provides panel with information that is up to date, accurate, and of sufficient detail to enable panel to make a recommendation of suitability. In particular, ensure that the fostering panel understands and acts on their responsibility in relation to overseeing the conduct of assessments completed by the fostering service.	
Where a person ("X") applies to become a foster parent and the fostering service provider decide to assess X's suitability to become a foster parent, any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation. Subject to paragraph (1B), the fostering service provider— must, as soon as reasonably practicable, obtain the information specified in Part 1 of Schedule 3 relating to X and other members of X's household and family. (Regulation 26 (1) (1A)(a)) In particular, ensure that Stage 1 assessment activity is only undertaken after an application to foster has been received and the fostering service has made a decision to assess the applicant's suitability to become a foster parent.	17 May 2024
If a fostering service provider decide to approve X as a foster parent they must— give X notice in writing specifying any terms on which the approval is given. (Regulation 27 (5)(a))	17 May 2024

The registered provider must provide the Chief Inspector with information requested for the purpose of considering the financial viability of the fostering agency, including— the annual accounts of the fostering agency, certified by an accountant; a reference from a bank expressing an opinion as to the registered provider’s financial standing; information as to the financing and financial resources of the fostering agency; where the registered provider is a company, information as to any of its associated companies; and a certificate of insurance for the registered provider in respect of liability which may be incurred by him in relation to the fostering agency in respect of death, injury, public liability, damage or other loss. (Regulation 37 (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)) In particular, ensure that the information detailed above is provided to the chief inspector by midday on the stated date.	5 April 2024
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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: 2704179

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Inspectors

Tracey Coglan Greig, Social Care Inspector
Jenny-Ellen Scotland, His Majesty's Inspector, Social Care

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