

Five Rivers Fostering Service

Five Rivers Child Care Limited

Suite 7, Westbury Court, Church Road, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol BS9 3EF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Five Rivers South West is a national independent fostering agency with several branches throughout England.

This service provides a range of fostering services, including short-term, long-term and emergency care for children who may have complex needs. The service also provides parent and child placements.

While managers have been in place, no manager has been registered with Ofsted since March 2023. One manager applied to register, however due to difficulties within the registration process there was a delay. The individual withdrew their application prior to interview.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 June 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 31 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Outcomes for children who are supported by the agency are mixed. Some children are making good progress and have stable and settled homes and are part of the family. However, assessments completed to match children with foster carers are not always robust. They do not consistently provide evidence that careful consideration and thought have been given to the situation before a child is placed. This has contributed to the high number of children who have experienced unplanned endings and poor care.

Many children build strong and trusting relationships with their foster carers, supervising social workers and fostering support workers. These workers are present in the home and regularly see children during their visits. On occasions, foster carers and supervising social workers have gone above and beyond to support children and their placements.

Children have a voice and are involved in appropriate activities within the organisation. This includes the recruitment of staff and the planning of participation events. Where children have additional communication needs, foster carers access bespoke training, which allows them to meet their needs. Children benefit from being supported to develop the skills they need to live independently or remain with their foster carer if appropriate.

Many foster carers provided positive feedback about the assessment process and the support they receive from the agency. The quality of assessments of foster carers is mixed. One assessment failed to fully explore the vulnerability of the foster carers and their capacity to meet children's needs fully.

All children are in education or training provisions which are in line with their needs and stages of development. Foster carers strongly advocate for children to receive the services and support that they need. Supervising social workers also play active roles in advocating for children when needed.

The health needs of children overall are met, and the planning that is undertaken to meet their individual needs is comprehensive. Delays in children receiving additional or specialist equipment are promptly addressed with external agencies and, where necessary, concerns are escalated. Foster carers receive the training that they require to meet children's health needs.

Foster carers know how to access support from their supervising social worker or the out of hours service. Effective systems are implemented for when allocated supervising social workers are not available. Foster carers are made aware of alternative arrangements in a timely manner. Most foster carers report being happy with the level of support they receive from the agency.

Relationships between children and their birth family are supported where appropriate. Any concerns in relation to family time and familial relationships are highlighted. Planning is undertaken, aiming to reduce negative impact on children. The completion of life story work is a priority and children are supported with this by trained practitioners.

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

The quality of safer care plans is mixed. Some contain useful information and easy to access guidance on the management of risk. However, some are too generic and not individualised to the child. They do not contain an overall picture of the child, their history and their needs. Clear strategies and guidance for foster carers to manage behaviour or lower risk are not detailed. Nevertheless, foster carers and supervising social workers spoken with knew the children and how to meet their needs.

The quality of safeguarding is not consistently of a good standard. There have been two occasions where decision-making has not protected children. Most recordings about children's lives do not provide sufficient detail about children's experiences. There are a high level of allegations made against foster carers. These are investigated by the agency thoroughly and in a timely manner. When deemed necessary, foster carers are taken back to the panel to make changes to or cease their registration if required.

Children rarely go missing from home. When they do, the agency ensures a proactive and multi-agency response. Children are supported to speak to independent people such as advocates following their return home. Restraint has not been used by foster carers who work for the agency.

Children are provided with clear boundaries, which has resulted in improved behaviours. However, there are instances where children have been placed with foster carers who lack the skills and experience required to keep them safe.

Most children are supported to take appropriate risks and to learn how to keep themselves safe. Foster carers understand the risks that using the internet can pose to children and, where necessary, are supported by the agency to monitor and report on children's usage.

Recruitment by the agency is safer. Necessary checks of staff are completed before they are employed, as part of robust recruitment procedures.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

There has been instability within this agency over the past 12 months. There have been a churn of supervising social workers and a manager. This has had a negative impact on the management oversight of the agency, and therefore on the lives of children. However, work has been completed to bring stability through the

recruitment of new supervising social workers and advertising to recruit a new manager. Experienced staff are scaffolding the agency while new systems of management oversight, auditing and review are implemented.

The effectiveness of the quality monitoring systems in the agency are mixed. Systems to analyse and implement learning from unplanned endings are not present. New systems to improve overall oversight of the agency are being developed. Some new systems are now part of practice. However, their effectiveness is not yet known. There is no mechanism in place to monitor the progress of children. Despite this, foster carers and supervising social workers can verbalise the progress that they have made.

The agency development plan does not clearly identify the strengths and areas for improvement for the agency. It is not time focused and detailed enough to aid the quality assurance process and development of the service.

A commissioner was very positive about the agency. They cited good working relationships and said that this is a child-focused agency. Supervising social workers and foster carers said that they receive good-quality training, support and supervision. Records of supervising social workers' supervision do not show reflective practice. These records do reflect the ability of supervisors to effectively raise concerns about staff practice. The agency actively supports foster carers to hold their own groups, which allow them to reflect on the agency independently and feed this back to managers.

Children's guides are not produced in a format accessible to all children. It is likely that a high number of children within the agency will not have fully understood the content of the existing documents.

The recruitment of foster carers is not meeting agency targets. Leaders and managers have reflected on the overall needs of the agency and are considering this in relation to future recruitment targets.

The panel takes place regularly. It is diverse and quorate. The panel chair is positive about their relationship with the agency, whose members have improved on previous timescales for the completion of and the quality of reports. On one occasion, an assessment of carers and, subsequently, a management review and the panel have failed to fully examine the vulnerabilities of applicants.

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 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(a)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that safer care plans are comprehensive and individualised to the needs of the child. They must provide foster carers with explicit guidance on how to support and care for children. In addition, the registered person must ensure that children are carefully matched to their foster carers and that foster carers have all of the information they need about the child. In addition, the registered person must ensure that work is completed to improve the stability of placements and to reduce unplanned endings.	17 August 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should, subject to the child's age and understanding, ensure that the child receives the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 33, paragraph 16.3)
- The registered person should ensure that there is clear and effective monitoring of the progress of the agency. This includes looking at mechanisms to collate information to inform and produce a clear and effective annual development plan. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.1)
- The registered person should ensure that records about children are regularly monitored to identify and address patterns and trends. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.2)

- The registered person should ensure that Form Fs set out all of the information that the panel needs to make an objective approval decision. The document should contain details of how any concerns that have been raised will be addressed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 29, paragraph 13.7)

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: SC036400

Registered provider: Five Rivers Child Care Limited

Registered provider address: Five Rivers Childcare, 47 Bedwin Street, Salisbury
SP1 3UT

Responsible individual: Jacob Strydom

Registered manager: no manager in place

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Email address: johan.strydom@five-rivers.org

Inspectors

Carla Simkiss, Social Care Inspector
Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector

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