

Five Rivers Fostering Service

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

Assurance visit

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 such as short-term, long-term and emergency care for children who may have complex needs. The service also provides parent and child placements. There are currently 172 carers within the Five Rivers South West region who care for 122 children. This totals to 98 foster families.

The manager has been registered since June 2019.

Visit dates: 10 to 11 March 2021

Previous inspection date: 17 January 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

This assurance visit was carried out virtually. Telephone calls, video meetings and emails took place with foster carers, managers, staff and other professionals, and documentation was scrutinised.

The outcomes and progress of children are recorded and monitored well. If foster carers are struggling to manage children's behaviour, increased oversight and specialist support is provided for carers and children.

Creative ways are used to engage children in decisions about their lives. For example, questions asked by children are used by panel members during interviews of new carers.

Care planning is child centred. For example, one child was clear that they do not want other children moving into their home long term. It was agreed by the agency that only children who need short-term care are moved into the home.

Foster carers challenge other professionals to secure specialist services that children need. Records completed by foster carers detail excellent insight into the lives of children. These will provide an important narrative for children in later life.

Feedback from carers depicted a high level of support received from the agency. A local authority social worker commented on the good standard of care provided to children.

Supervising social workers do not always speak to children during visits with carers. Records of visits lack detail and do not always depict professional curiosity. This means that the impact of any changes in children's lives is not explored.

The safety of children

Safeguarding concerns and allegations are actioned effectively. Robust management oversight helps to ensure the safety of children.

A new policy has been developed which states that appropriate assessments are completed when partners move in with foster carers and children. This will help to provide an important level of scrutiny.

There is no established policy and procedure for the placement of parents and children with foster carers. There is a lack of guidance for the assessment of placing other children in conjunction with a parent and child. Safeguards in this respect are lacking.

Safer care plans are not of a consistently good standard. They do not look in depth at the individual safeguarding needs of children and how those needs will be met, for example how to manage self-harming behaviours. Risk assessments completed provide clearer guidance for carers.

The records of placement planning meetings lack important details and are not always signed by parents and all relevant professionals. This means that expectations and safeguards for children are not always clear and accountability is lacking.

Annual unannounced visits to foster carers in most families are out of timescales. To date, 32 out of 42 of these visits have not been completed. This is due to the impact of COVID- 19.

Leaders and managers

Leaders and managers know children and foster carers well. They have a good understanding about what is happening for children. This enables them to identify and provide extra support when needed.

Leaders and managers have identified learning opportunities from a serious incident in 2018 and are making the improvements required. These include additional training for new foster carers and scrutiny of practice.

Development training for existing parent and child carers has not been provided. There are no current parent and child placements. More time is needed to ensure that required improvements are embedded into practice.

Annual review reports completed by supervising social workers about foster carers are thorough. They explore the capacity of foster carers to meet the needs of the children in their care well.

The panel is carrying out an effective quality assurance function. There is appropriate challenge during decision-making activities and decisions are ratified by the agency decision-maker. Panel members receive regular training to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to undertake their roles.

Ofsted does not receive regular reports about the agency's development areas. This is required by regulations.

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
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, safer care plans must be comprehensive and individualised to the needs of the child.	8 April 2021
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which— is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse and neglect, and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. The written policy must include a statement of measures to be taken to safeguard any child before making parent and child arrangements with that foster parent. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b) (2))	8 April 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that supervising social workers make regular visits to the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. ('The Children's Act 1989 Volume 4: Fostering Services', page 51, paragraph 5.67) In particular, visits to carers throughout the year should include the views of the child.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC036400

Registered provider: Five Rivers Child Care Limited

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

Responsible individual: Martin Leitch

Registered manager: Adrian Chappell

Inspectors

Polly Soper, Social Care Inspector

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector

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