

Five Rivers Family Placement Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC062786
Inspection date	22 August 2007
Inspector	Trisha Gibbs
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	13 June 2006

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The fostering service is part of the Five Rivers Family Placement Limited which has several branches throughout England and Ireland. The Ripley office in Derbyshire has been in operation since November 2004 and provides placements for children and young people between 0 to 18 years. The fostering service is currently supporting 12 children in 10 placements. The staff team consists of a Registered Manager, a senior supervising social worker and an administrative assistant. In addition to this the Registered Manager assists with the supervision and support of a senior supervising social worker and six children in six placements in the Middlesbrough area.

Summary

The inspection was carried out over three days and included a visit to carers and children, interviews and discussions with the staff team and the inspection of some children and carer files. Monitoring reports were looked at in addition to the fostering service policies and procedures and other documentation. Comments from carers' children and placing social workers were sought through questionnaires. Almost a third of those sent out were returned and provided good feedback about the service. No concerns were raised. This fostering service provides very good support to children and young people to promote their health, positive identity and education. Consultation with children is given a high priority and their views are respected. Carers are provided with very good support with good development and training opportunities. The service is well managed.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the fostering service has implemented the use of matching reports and a matching matrix is now also ready for use. This will demonstrate how the needs of the child will be considered against the experience and skills of the proposed carer at time of placement. Shortfalls can then be identified and accounted for.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's health and development is positively promoted by the fostering service. Children and carer records show that routine health appointments are being maintained. A dedicated health section in each child's file includes a separate individualised health record that details their health needs and is updated when necessary. Carers looking after children who have special health needs are provided with appropriate professional health and medical support. Health information about children is recorded by foster carers in daily diaries and in monthly summaries completed by carers. The monthly summaries are subsequently forwarded to placing social workers. Carers recognise the importance of encouraging children to eat healthy food and to enjoy physical activities. Children, in questionnaires, were able to identify why it is important to eat healthy food and to take part in sporting activities. A special medical administration record sheet is available for carers to complete when children are prescribed medication. An instance was noted of the medication administration sheet not being utilised where several medications were being administered to one young person on a daily basis. The

carer handbook provides very good health and medical guidance. This is supported by a good carer training programme. Health related training over the last year has included Working with Young People with Eating Disorders, First Aid, Drug Awareness and Sexual Health and Relationships.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The Registered Manager is suitably qualified and has significant experience in child care, child protection work and fostering. No new staff have been appointed since the last inspection. Signed confirmation of required checks was provided with regard to a supervising social worker appointed to work in another geographical area but currently linked with this service. All supervising social workers are registered with the General Social Care Council. Very good attention is given to safe care by staff and carers. Excellent safe care policies were seen on files and carers have copies of these. Safe care policies are drawn up in consultation with children and signed by everyone. Carers showed a very good understanding of the need for safe care practices in the home. Those visited provided a safe and comfortable environment for children. Safe care and child protection issues are routinely discussed and summarised in monthly supervision. Risk assessments are also completed to identify and address any areas of risk within each new placement. Comprehensive health and safety check lists are undertaken annually. The carer handbook provides very good information about child protection and a strong training programme is available to help carers understand the impact of abuse and the implications of caring for a child who has been abused. Some training is provided by the NSPCC. Consultation for carers and therapeutic input for children can be accessed when this has been necessary to support a placement. Carers said in questionnaires how much they valued and benefited from the training and support provided by the agency. Children's files showed that good attention is given to the matching of children to placement. Files looked at included matching reports in addition to other placement planning tools. A new matching matrix is now being introduced. Very good attention had been given to the introduction of children to placement in the cases looked at. Timetables had been drawn up at special planning meetings to discuss and manage this process. Although the fostering service does not have placement agreement as such, appropriate Looked After Children admission forms provide the essential information necessary at time of placement. These had been signed by carers. The fostering service continues to present applications and reviews to the Fostering Panel in Cheltenham, although it is planned in the future for this service to relate to a new Fostering Panel being set up in the North Region. The Cheltenham Panel was not observed during this inspection however minutes from the last three Panel meetings were inspected. The Fostering Panel membership list provided for the inspection did not identify a named Vice Chair. The Inspector was subsequently informed that there was a nominated Vice Chair. However, this named person was not identified as Vice Chair on the membership list provided but only as an 'independent member and social work representative'. Nor was this the person who chaired the Fostering Panel in June this year in the absence of the Chair. The Fostering Panel minutes in respect of one application were unsatisfactory in clarifying a confusing and potentially concerning situation. The issues raised within the meeting, as recorded, suggested that checks on the applicants were seriously outstanding and that approval was being sought on the basis of an old Local Authority assessment and not a new assessment undertaken by the Five Rivers fostering service. The Fostering Panel ultimately recommended approval but the minutes do not reflect on what basis the approval was recommended given the concerns raised.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Carers are routinely provided with equality and diversity training starting with their Introduction to Fostering course. The carer group is currently predominately white. External training and support is available to carers who are looking after children with special ethnic and cultural needs if this is assessed as necessary. Some carers are currently being provided with specialist training and support to provide care for children with disabilities and complex needs. The fostering service is planning to provide carer training and information about sexual orientation. The Registered Manager confirmed that matching processes ensure that children's religious and cultural needs are carefully considered against the placement being provided. An equality and diversity resource pack for staff and carers is being developed for use throughout the organisation. Staff and carers are committed to working in partnership with schools to positively support children and young people in education. Cases tracked showed that where good working relationships had been established with the school this had resulted in positive outcomes for children in terms of their achievement and placement stability. Some young people who at the time of placement had not attended school have been introduced back into mainstream education. They are now leaving school to start college in the autumn. Educational achievement is monitored by the agency and carers keep an educational record for each child. Educational achievements and success is celebrated at special events. The manager noted plans to celebrate less obvious but equally valid personal achievements where children's successes are not necessarily academic. Hobbies and personal interests are promoted.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Good examples were seen of carers supporting family contact arrangements; some of these are of a complex nature. Information about contact is properly recorded and carried through from time of placement. Individual detailed plans are drawn up to facilitate contact so that everyone is clear about their role and responsibility. Where necessary risk assessments are carried out. Carers visited were very aware of the need to support children to maintain their family links. Placing social workers made positive comments about the commitment of carers and staff to promote positive contact. The fostering service places a very high priority on consultation with children. Examples were noted of carers and staff advocating for children and young people and this resulting in very positive placement outcomes. Birth children and fostered children are routinely consulted at carer reviews. They are supported by the service to prepare for their Looked After Children review. Supervising social workers talk to both birth children and children in placement when visiting the home. The staff team are now producing a special colourful individualised consultation booklet for each child placed. Out of school clubs and special holiday activity events are provided for all children. The manager has recently purchased a 'Total Respect' training pack produced by Children's Rights Officers and Advocates organisation. This includes training videos, books, leaflets and key contacts. The pack has been informed by the experiences of young people who are actively involved within the organisation. It is planned that this resource will be utilised for mandatory post approval training.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Carers are provided with an Independent Living Skills programme to work through with young people to prepare them for independence and to support their Pathway Plans. Some young people have had their placements confirmed until they are eighteen years and there are good examples of carers supporting them in further education placements. Good information about financial process and carer payments is provided in the carer handbook. Carers' payments appropriately cover the costs of caring for children in placement.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The national Statement of Purpose for the fostering service contains the required information. Information about the Ripley staff team is placed within the main document. Two colourful Children's Guides are available for older and younger children and these are being revised. The small staff team consists of the Registered Manager, a supervising social worker and an administrator. All are well qualified and experienced to undertake their respective responsibilities. They currently support ten sets of carers and twelve placements and work positively and efficiently together. There is a commitment to the support of good quality well-matched placements. Given that four carer applications are currently being processed and that recruitment is ongoing, consideration is being given to the appointment of an additional supervising social worker. The Registered Manager also provides some supervision and support for a supervising social worker based in Middlesbrough who is supporting six carers in that region. It is planned for a separate registration application to be submitted in relation to this area of the service in the near future. The Registered Manager meets with other Five Rivers managers several times during the year. Carers say they are very well supported by the fostering team. They said that 'professional and personal support is available at all times' and 'we cannot fault the support we get'. Others commented on the 'integrity and professionalism' of the service. Information about out of hours support is provided on a monthly basis and carers are confident that they can access this at any time of the day or night. Training opportunities are good and relevant. A carer commented that 'we have an excellent training programme and books and literature are readily available'. Supervision is provided on a weekly basis to new carers with placements and this reduces to monthly after a given period. The standard of supervision is very good and the areas covered include both the needs of carers and children. Typed copies are signed by carers and the supervising social worker. Unannounced visits are separately recorded and filed. Annual reviews give good attention to carer competencies and development. Regular carer support group meetings are used as an opportunity for training sessions as well as informal support. Complaints and allegations records were looked at in addition to the required monitoring of incidents and other service activity. No allegations have been recorded since the last inspection. One complaint registered by a carer to the fostering service in February is still ongoing and appears to be drifting. This is being dealt with at a higher management level, however the timescales outlined within the agency's complaints procedure have not been adhered to. Monitoring systems maintained at the office are good and feed into the national monitoring systems. Records maintained for children and foster carers are in good order and are well organised. Key documents are in place for carers and children and appropriately filed. Monthly summaries are completed by carers and contain information about each child's placement under the five Every Child Matters outcomes. These are submitted to placing social workers who reported that this information is valued.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
30	ensure that where concerns have been raised about an application by the Fostering Panel that minutes must reflect on what basis approval has been ultimately recommended Regulation 25 (2)	30 September 2007
30	ensure that on the occasion of the Panel Chair being unavailable to chair the Fostering Panel meeting only the Vice Chair will chair the meeting. Regulation 24 (4)	30 September 2007

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- bring to a resolution the complaint that was registered in February this year in line with the Five Rivers Complaints Procedure timescales. National Minimum Standard 22.8
- provide a list of the Fostering Panel membership clearly identifying the role of each Panel member. National Minimum Standard 30.1 Regulation 24
- ensure foster carers complete the medication administration record whenever medication is administered to children and young people. National Minimum Standard 12.3

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.