

Five Fostering

Five Fostering Ltd

School House, Mill Bank Farm, Top Road, Hooe, East Sussex TN33 9HA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency provides short-term, long-term, short-break and emergency placements for children.

There are eleven fostering households registered, with ten children currently living with these families.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since July 2013.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 December 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	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	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 4 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Carers are proactive and invested in children's welfare and experiences. They are motivated by the support they receive from the agency's staff, who model good practice. The central ethos of creating a family feel for children, in the context of supportive relationships, is highly valued by everyone connected to the agency.

Children speak positively about their carers and of their experiences with fostering families. One child was thrilled about their Spiderman birthday celebrations. Another said, 'I don't think anything could be better. I am happy.'

Social events organised by the agency for foster carers and children are well attended. Children are encouraged to bring along people who are important to them. The events are planned with thought and care to ensure all children have positive experiences. Staff and carers welcome the opportunity to have fun with children.

External professionals give glowing feedback about the quality of care provided to children and the effectiveness of communication with the agency. One child's social worker said the child was 'delighted' to have been matched long term with their carers and that the staff and carers 'immerse themselves in his care and provide extremely well for his needs'.

Foster carers show commitment to supporting children's educational needs. They also encourage learning opportunities when children are not at school. One professional said, 'Carers read daily with him and praise each bit of progress.' Another carer recalled the fun she had with a child, teaching her times tables at home.

Children's health needs are appropriately addressed and form a central aspect of the support provided to children. Carers are also well equipped to improve children's emotional and developmental outcomes. One carer provided the professional network with highly detailed observations informed by knowledge of key development indicators of the child in her care. The richness of this information is one example of the quality of expertise and knowledge of the agency's carers.

Progress of children is routinely monitored and partnership working between foster carers and the agency enables children to feel safe and secure. The goodwill of carers and staff is instrumental in achieving child-focused outcomes. One carer said that their 'biggest happiness' is that their child has learned to willingly accept care.

There are multiple systems in place that demonstrate that children's views are important and that their feedback is heard. The agency has a dedicated 'voice of the child' practitioner who proactively seeks out children's views. Children know how to complain if they are unhappy with any aspect of their care. Information available to children, such as the children's guide, is carefully considered to ensure it is accessible and child-friendly. Improvements have been made to the guide since the

last inspection. Additionally, children have been provided with individualised carry cards so they have contact details for advocacy services and other agencies that can offer support. Welcome books for children are bespoke and efforts are made to welcome children sensitively and encourage them to feel at home within the wider caring network.

Carers proactively support children to achieve the goals that are important to them. Children are helped to learn independence skills in a way that is appropriate to their age and development. In one example, the carer of a child who was particularly anxious about leaving home on his own devised a plan to build their confidence. The child is now better equipped for travelling to school independently.

Improvements have been made to the referral and matching processes since the last inspection. The current process is structured and considers the individual needs of the children and whether carers can realistically meet these needs. However, there have been some occasions when information has been received late from placing authorities, which has had a negative impact on children's experiences. The registered manager is taking steps to ensure information is received from the placing authority in a timely way and that this system is more robust and consistent.

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

Safeguarding practice in the agency is proactive and responsive. Incidents where children are at risk of harm are rare. When they do occur, there is a good level of professional curiosity and oversight. Standard of care reports are thorough and are returned to panel for a comprehensive review.

Carers have a sound understanding of children's risks and vulnerabilities. They support children to understand risk and are confident at helping them to reduce the chances of them coming to harm or causing harm to others. For some children, this work has complemented the exploration of their life story and required them to confront difficult early-life experiences. Carers skilfully and sensitively help children to navigate this, which contributes to children's protection and sense of security.

Staff communicate concerns to the wider professional and familial networks when appropriate and use this consultation to inform their response. They also offer practical and emotional support to fostering families and children when there are challenging or upsetting situations.

Carers and staff go above and beyond to help children maintain positive relationships with their families. They prioritise children's safety and well-being and build strong relationships with children's families so opportunities for family time are maximised. Some brothers and sisters do not live together, but the close community that has formed between carers within the agency ensures that children see their siblings regularly. One carer said they 'work as a team' and described the positive relationship they have with the child's birth family, which promotes safe and consistent care.

On the rare occasions when children make allegations about foster carers, the agency follows up according to its internal policies and procedures. There is evidence of the child's voice in any referrals made to the local authority designated officer and these are made in a timely way. However, there have been some occasions when allegations have not been recognised as such and therefore have not been robustly managed.

Safer recruitment processes for agency staff are sound and the induction process is robust, with good oversight. Probation reviews consider the targets and goals to individually develop newly recruited members of the staff team. They review strengths and areas for development in a supportive way and consider how this links to the development of the wider agency.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leadership team has good relationships with the children and carers in the agency. The registered manager has high expectations for what children can achieve and places an emphasis on ensuring that safe care is achieved for all children. This child-led approach is emulated by staff and carers, and is evident in supervision, annual reviews, safeguarding practice and feedback from professionals and carers.

The manager and the responsible individual have been with the agency a long time. They understand their strengths and possess the experience necessary to determine the development needs of the agency. They welcome feedback and use this to ensure that they continually improve outcomes for children. There are changes currently being made to the leadership of the organisation. However, the strengths and complementary skills of the management team currently are evident in their collaborative practice. The management team is well valued. Staff and foster carers alike speak positively about the registered manager.

Leaders have committed their attention and resources to recruitment of more carers to the agency. While this has proved to be a challenging undertaking in the current climate, they have devised creative and methodical approaches to increase interest. The agency continues to be financially viable and is committed to seeking out dedicated carers.

Carers know how to raise any concerns they have. The agency has a clear complaints procedure and transparency is prioritised. The agency has sought the oversight of a quality assurance committee (QAC) to offer reassurance to potential complainants that their concerns will be managed with independent scrutiny. The QAC and regular audits add additional layers of monitoring and quality assurance, to promote better outcomes and identify any improvements to be made more generally in the agency.

Supervisions and appraisals are undertaken consistently, and the quality of discussions support child-focused practice. The staff have the relevant skills and expertise in fostering, which offers a good level of support to carers and children. Staff routinely support carers at meetings of all relevant professionals relating to

supporting children. The added resource of therapeutic support is available for carers so they can reflect on their role in children's lives. This also promotes their own emotional well-being.

Carer suitability is well evidenced through thorough and detailed assessment. Analysis is balanced and well scrutinised by an effective panel. The diversity of the panel has been carefully considered by leaders. Feedback from newly recruited carers and in assessments evidences a sensitive approach to carers' needs and circumstances.

Leaders provide their supervising social workers with support to challenge external agencies on behalf of carers and children when necessary. This has had a direct positive impact on children's care and outcomes.

The agency promotes the learning and development of its staff and carers. Leaders ensure that there is a range of training opportunities to enable carers to support children placed in their care effectively. Carers spoke about the profound impact of one such learning event. However, on some occasions, there have been delays to carers accessing or completing identified training that is specific to the needs of their child, thereby reducing their capacity to respond in the most appropriate way.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers have full information about the child (as set out in standard 3.9) as far as is reasonably possible prior to placement. Processes to ensure information is received from the placing authority in a timely way should be robust and consistent. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 11.2)
- The registered person should ensure that all foster carers, fostering service staff and volunteers understand what they must do if they receive an allegation or have suspicions about harmful behaviour towards a child. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.1)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers receive sufficient training on health issues and first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion and communicable diseases. This should be completed in a timely fashion and in keeping with the identified needs of children placed with carers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 6.7)

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: SC462226

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Inspector

Tash Williams, Social Care Inspector

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