

# 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 such as short-term, long-term and emergency care for children who may have complex needs. The service also provides parent and child placements.

The manager has been registered since June 2019.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 31 January to 3 February 2022

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 17 January 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

The agency has managed the impact of COVID-19 well. Meetings and visits have at times been carried out virtually. However, when required, home visits have continued. This has ensured children have remained visible and support for carers has been consistent.

A skilled practitioner in the agency is supporting children to engage in therapeutic life-story work. During the inspection, this practice was seen to have a positive impact for children, helping them to understand their histories in a nurturing way.

The agency employs a clinical practitioner. They are used to improve practice and ensure that responses to children's needs are underpinned by a therapeutic base. Every child has a psychological screening assessment that identifies progress in their emotional well-being and highlights vulnerabilities. Children receive bespoke care and therapeutic support in line with their needs.

Children have trusting relationships with fostering support workers. Helping children to settle into their placements is also a key focus. When children arrive at their new homes, support to both children and carers is increased by the agency.

There is evidence of strong and appropriate challenge when children are not receiving the right education for their individual needs. There are good examples of shared therapeutic approaches across home and school. As a result, children are provided with appropriate parenting and boundaries that they understand.

During visits undertaken by supervising social workers, children are fully considered and, when possible, spoken with. This is ensuring important oversight of care arrangements from the perspective of the child. However, this is not always recorded in full and at times records lack important narrative. Also, at times, language used to describe children's behaviours is not always child-centred.

The agency promotes excellent and effective participation by children. Children give their time to support the planning of events. This indicates that they find them meaningful and enjoyable. Several activities are offered to children where they can meet other children and share their experiences. The agency considers and acts on children's feedback, and this has led to improvements in practice.

A child spoken with during the inspection told inspectors that they would know how to complain if they needed to. They feel that if they were unhappy about anything managers would resolve this for them. However, the information given to children prior to coming into the care of the agency is not always appropriate to the ages and needs of children. This includes the complaints leaflet.

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

Safeguarding practice is of a good standard. Concerns are acted upon and thoroughly investigated. Similarly, when there are allegations, the agency carries out robust enquiries and safeguards are put into place. However, challenge to other agencies is lacking when they fail to provide responses [or timely responses] to enquiries. This means that, at times, children and carers are experiencing considerable delay in the conclusion of these matters.

The agency holds weekly multi-agency meetings to ensure that plans for children who are in emergency and short-term placements are kept on track. This multi-agency working allows different perspectives on children's plans to be explored thoroughly. Actions are set and reviewed regularly. As a result, drift for children is avoided.

The local authority provides updates to placement searches and acts on new information from the agency about children's needs. A child was involved in one of these meetings attended by the inspector. The child said that having the meetings helped ease their anxiety as they were aware of and involved in the plans that were being made and how they were progressing.

Matching assessments are not always robust. In one case, a child with a history of being abused by their siblings was placed with another child, with no assessment of the impact of this on both children.

A great deal of work has been undertaken to ensure all safer care plans are of a good standard. However, at times, safer care plans do not provide the required risk management information. Known risks are discussed with foster carers prior to children coming into placement.

Supervising social workers provide good support to carers, which is balanced with appropriate challenge when needed. Furthermore, important reflective discussions are often held, which helps to promote good parenting.

The practice in respect of parent and child placements has improved. This includes a thorough safer care planning approach. As a result, considered and reflective supervision between a supervising social worker and the carer could also be seen.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The registered manager has good oversight of all areas of practice and is dedicated to promoting children's best interests. He actively drives improvement, which could be seen throughout the inspection. He and his team know children well and seek to provide a high standard of support to both children and carers.

When there are disagreements about local authority plans for children, supervising social workers challenge and escalate this. This is helping to ensure that care planning is in line with children's best interests.

Overall, the function of the fostering panel is of a good standard. The panel appropriately questions and challenges carers, promoting careful consideration of any concerns identified during the review process. At times, identified learning needs for carers are not concluded effectively. This includes a lack of clear consideration of such issues by the agency decision-maker within the final decision-making process.

There is a consensus from foster carers that they receive high-quality support from the agency. One carer said that the agency went above and beyond to support her when she contracted COVID-19 and was hospitalised. Another carer commented that support is available from the agency throughout the day and night. This has meant that they do not feel alone when dealing with crisis situations.

Foster carers value the training offered by the agency. They report that in addition to mandatory training they can request courses that are tailored to support the specific needs of the children in their care. However, at times when mandatory training has not been completed, this has not always been challenged effectively by the agency.

The agency has safer recruitment policies and procedures that ensure appropriate adults are employed to work with families. Most senior practitioners are trained in safer recruitment practice.

## 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
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>In particular, safer care plans must be comprehensive and individualised to the needs of the child.</p>	17 April 2022

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement and that foster carers have full information about the child (as set out in standard 3.9). ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 23, paragraph 11.2)
- The registered person should, subject to the child's age and understanding, ensure 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 information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled fairly, quickly and consistently, in a way that provides effective protection for the child and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation. Fostering services should follow the framework for managing cases of allegations of abuse against people who work with children as set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'. This includes ensuring the escalation regarding drift and delay in respect of other agencies' enquiries, to

ensure timely outcomes. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 45, paragraph 22.9)

## **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:** 47 Bedwin Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3UT

**Responsible individual:** Martin Leitch

**Registered manager:** Adrian Chappell

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## **Inspectors**

Polly Soper, Social Care Inspector

Penelope Kutz, Social Care Inspector

Louise Bacon, Social Care Inspector

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