

Five Rivers Fostering Service – West Country

Five Rivers Child Care Limited

Park House, Threemilestone Business Park, Truro, Cornwall TR4 9LD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Five Rivers 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.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 6 January 2020

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: 7 to 11 March 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: 6 March 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

Outcomes for children are consistently good. Inspectors saw many examples of the good progress that children have made. Three siblings who were unable to live together due to their experiences of trauma have been permanently reunited. This is due to the nurturing and individualised care they have received from their foster carers.

Children's achievements are celebrated. Children have opportunities to engage in fundraising activities and projects that build their self-esteem and self-confidence. They are supported by a team of dedicated fostering support workers.

Foster carers are dedicated to helping children build trusting relationships and develop family-like bonds. Children who experience crisis situations are well supported. Carers and social workers liaise with the local authority to ensure that plans for children meet their needs.

Almost all children engage in education and do well. Foster carers support children's academic progress, and their achievements are praised and rewarded. High standards are set for children.

Children's health needs are consistently met. Carers ensure that they have access to local health services. Children with more complex health needs receive very good levels of care. The agency ensures that resources are made available for them when the local authority has not responded in a timely manner.

Leaders and managers ensure that there are many ways that children can contribute to the improvement of the service. They value children's views, wishes and feelings.

Children have opportunities to engage in a wide range of activities. These are organised by their foster carers and the agency team. There are wonderful events that are arranged by the fostering support workers where children can have fun, make new friends and share experiences. Children told inspectors that the agency is outstanding.

Children know how to make a complaint. When complaints are received, thorough investigations are undertaken. These are dealt with in a timely manner. However, letters to children informing them of the outcome of investigations lack an appropriate narrative. They do not fully demonstrate that children have been listened to or how their view and feelings have been considered.

The agency supports children's relationships with their families. It provides supervision for family time when the local authority has not had sufficient resources. This ensures that children continue to spend time with the people that matter to them.

Matching considerations are not consistent. The inspectors saw good examples, but some reports do not show that appropriate consideration has been taken of how the needs of all children will be met within the home. This was identified in the previous inspection.

Children's records are detailed and accurate. However, language used to describe children's behaviours is not always child centred.

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

The agency has effective safeguarding practices. When allegations are made, investigations are thorough and conclusions are timely. The agency promotes a strong multi-agency approach through good information-sharing. Leaders challenge the advice of other professionals when it does not keep children safe.

Social workers are child-centred in their practice. However, supervising social workers do not always challenge carers, or ensure that any concerns raised during visits to children's homes are addressed robustly. For example, recordings do not always show the actions taken in relation to concerns or reflect on the information gathered.

The quality of safer care plans is inconsistent. Some are of a good standard and provide important practical guidance to help carers keep children safe. Others do not ensure that known risk is clearly explored and that guidance is clear. This was identified at the previous inspection

When children go missing from care, recordings are detailed and provide a clear record of the actions that carers take to locate children and alert other professionals. However, independent return home discussions with children do not always take place, and when they do, a record of discussions is not always present on the child's file. This was identified at the previous inspection.

Children receive good levels of support to manage their behaviour and feelings. Carers and social workers are supported by a clinical psychologist, who provides valuable advice and practical guidance. This has led to good outcomes for children. Children spoken with told inspectors that they feel safe and happy.

Physical interventions are rarely used. When they are, their use is proportionate. In most cases, the least restrictive practice is used, such as guiding holds to help children calm and keep safe. Recordings of incidents are detailed. There is good management oversight, with reflection to help prevent further incidents.

Foster carers and supervising social workers are knowledgeable and skilled. They have access to good-quality training. Leaders and managers ensure that all adults complete regular mandatory training and have the skills to meet children's needs and keep them safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency demonstrates strong recruitment practices for staff and carers. The assessment process for prospective foster carers is robust. Assessment reports are of a good standard. Decisions to approve are supported by a conscientious panel, whose members examine and question the suitability of carers in a fair and sensitive way. The agency decision maker provides a further layer of oversight. This ensures that only the most appropriate carers are appointed.

Leaders have good oversight of children's plans. The registered manager knows children well and has a good understanding of their needs. Regular monitoring of practice takes place and shortfalls are identified and resolved. Leaders drive improvements that lead to positive outcomes for children. They set high standards for children and adults.

The social work team is assisted by a well-oiled support team. This ensures that there is good communication between foster carers and social workers. They support carers by helping with financial issues and other clerical difficulties. This allows carers to focus their time on meeting children's needs.

The agency has very good relationships with external professionals. Local authority social workers told inspectors that communication is fantastic, and concerns are consistently shared.

The agency is proactive in challenging the local authority to escalate concerns when a care plan does not meet a child's needs. The complex health needs of one child were only recognised due to the skilled oversight of the supervising social worker. The child is now receiving high levels of quality care. Children's safety, welfare and happiness are at the centre of the agency's ethos.

Foster carers gave overwhelmingly positive feedback to inspectors about the support they receive from the agency. They value the expertise of the supervising social workers. They told inspectors that there is always someone that they can speak to if they have concerns.

Managers ensure that social workers receive regular, quality supervision. This provides opportunities for reflective discussions about practice and case complexities. Recordings of supervision are detailed, and action points are reviewed at subsequent sessions. Staff report feeling well supported and valued.

Carers receive good-quality supervision that supports their well-being, identifies training needs and leads to quality care for children.

The Children's Guide for younger children is not written in a way that is easy for children to understand. This is a nationally produced document.

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 must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>(Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that children are carefully matched with a foster carer and that all children within the placement have their individual needs considered.</p>	18 May 2022
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a policy, which is agreed with the local police, setting out—</p> <p>the measures to be followed to prevent children placed with foster parents from going missing from their placement, and</p> <p>the procedure to be followed when a child is missing from a foster parent's home without permission.</p> <p>(Regulation 13(3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	18 May 2022
<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.</p> <p>(Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that safer care plans are comprehensive and individualised to the needs of the child.</p>	18 May 2022

Recommendations

- 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, 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 that areas of concern, or need for additional support, that are identified between foster carer reviews are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews are addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 29, paragraph 13.9)
- The registered person should ensure that children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. Children should receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised and are kept informed of progress. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 9, paragraph 1.6)

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: SC062487

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

Responsible individual: Martin Leitch

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Inspectors

Penelope Kutz, Social Care Inspector

Polly Soper, Social Care Inspector

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