

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 Fostering Service 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.

A new manager registered with Ofsted in August 2025.

Inspection dates: 27 to 30 October 2025

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: 10 June 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The care provided to children has supported them to make progress. Foster carers provide children with the care they need to feel settled and secure in their homes. Children are accepted for who they are and their achievements are celebrated. Additionally, children are provided with appropriate and consistent respite care that allows them to develop positive relationships with these foster carers.

Children have a wide range of experiences. Many children have experienced family holidays and enjoy activities such as going to football matches, sports training, being part of a team and attending museums. Foster carers nurture children's hobbies and interests and ensure that their religious and culture needs are met. Children excitedly spoke about their upcoming plans for Halloween.

The agency works collaboratively with education provisions to ensure that children's learning needs are met. If children arrive to foster carers without an education provision, one is promptly identified and work completed to secure a place for the child.

Identifying and responding to children's health needs is a strength of the agency. Foster carers receive specialist training and support from health services to meet children's needs. One family have experienced exceptional levels of support in order to respond to a child's specific and complex health needs.

The level of intervention from the therapeutic team has improved. The agency is proactive in identifying families who would benefit from their services, particularly at an early stage or when things become unsettled. This directly contributes to positive outcomes for children. Feedback from foster carers and professionals highlights the value of this intervention and of the therapeutic training that foster carers receive.

The agency has a clear focus on children's participation. This underpins useful tools such as guides, videos and workshops which are created about a range of issues that children face in childhood, for example racism and bullying. Children are involved in the interviews of new staff, receiving training to participate in this role.

Children are encouraged to develop skills essential for adult life. For example, one child has been supported to travel to college and cook meals, another child has been helped to manage their medication independently and to increase their self-care skills.

The quality of planning for children to move to a new home is mixed. Children are helped to settle into their homes. However, in some examples there is not a consistent approach to assessing the dynamics and impact of the move and the support that foster carers or children may require.

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

Foster carers understand the risks associated with the online world. Staff receive training that they use to support foster carers to increase their knowledge about online safety. This has directly informed safeguarding responses that have reduced risks for children. Foster carers understand the risks for children who use the internet. Where necessary, they are supported by the agency to monitor and report on children's usage.

There have been no allegations against foster carers reported. This is a significant reduction over this period. Concerns about foster carer practice are addressed through standard of care investigations. The agency appropriately shares concerns with wider organisations to support the ongoing safeguarding of children.

When safeguarding incidents occur, there is a strong response from the agency. They work alongside partner agencies to inform appropriate decision making. Concerns about the practice of partner agencies are addressed. However, on one occasion an incident notifiable to Ofsted was not made.

The quality of children's risk reduction plans has improved. They identify the risks that children face. However, the actions that the agency need to take to support foster carers to manage and reduce risk are not fully considered and recorded thoroughly.

Through the support of the clinical team foster carers are upskilled to understand and respond to children's behaviour that challenges them. Foster carers use this learning in their practice. However, social work discussions with foster carers do not further ensure that these approaches are embedded into the children's daily care.

There has been one incident of restraint to protect a child from harm. While the measure used was proportionate, the incident has not been recorded and reviewed effectively, including seeking the child's views.

Conflict between children is addressed to support the development of positive relationships between children. Work with a foster carer has focused on conflict management. This was complimented by the social worker completing restorative work with the children as a person independent of the household.

There are no concerns about staff recruitment. Effective systems are in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with foster carers and children.

Foster carers have access to a varied range of online training. Participation in this is high.

There has been one incident where a child has been missing from home. Responses when the child was missing were immediate and coordinated to ensure that they were located quickly. Learning from the incident has identified areas for improvement to reduce the risk of a child going missing in the future.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Following an extended period of instability within the management team, a new registered manager is in post. Leadership and management of the agency is now led by an experienced and cohesive team who know the agency and have built relationships with foster carers, children and staff. The agency benefits from a full, suitably qualified staff team who provide support to families. Managers are committed to achieving the best outcomes for children.

The recruitment of foster carers is successful but has not had a positive impact on fostering sufficiency. Challenges in the retention of foster carers have been recognised. A response to this has been devised and managers have said that a focused strategy relating to this is due to be implemented. The agency does well to recruit foster carers who can meet the needs of children with complex needs.

Records do not provide sufficient detail to fully understand how interventions support children's experiences and care. Decision-making for children is not always recorded effectively, and some documents such as matching documents are not always completed in a timely way. Managers have not identified and addressed these gaps effectively. This reduces opportunities to identify and respond to any patterns and trends.

Foster carers receive regular supervision sessions. Supervision visit records provide information about foster carer and children's experiences. However, the majority lack reflection and challenge to fully understand how foster carers are helped to meet the needs of children. Discussion with staff did not always demonstrate in-depth knowledge about the interventions used to support carers, including how therapeutic training is used in children's everyday care.

Staff receive regular supervision sessions and attend team meetings. Staff supervision records provide an overview of fostering households, including plans for children. However, they lack professional challenge and reflection to fully understand children's experiences and the care that is required to inform the support and advice provided to foster carers. Similar to this are team meetings. Staff feedback is that the clinical supervision that they receive is beneficial for their roles.

Staff have access to relevant training. Managers support the continuing professional development of staff to progress in their roles.

The fostering panel takes place regularly and provides an effective quality assurance function. This includes challenge from the agency decision maker when required. The quality of analysis and highlighting vulnerabilities within assessments of potential foster carers is identified as an area for improvement to ensure consistent high standards.

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 fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that foster carers are provided with reflective supervision that covers the needs of foster carers and children. Supervision must provide respectful challenge and show inquisitiveness about the lives of children and evidence how the agency will respond to any concerns or support needs.</p> <p>In addition, the registered person must ensure that foster carer supervision considers whether interventions, such as therapeutic care, are thoroughly understood by foster carers and implemented in children's day-to-day care.</p>	3 January 2026
<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, the registered person must ensure that planning to reduce risks for children clearly sets out how the agency will support foster carers to manage and reduce risk.</p>	3 January 2026

Recommendations

- The registered person should, ensure that records of staff supervision provide sufficient detail. This should include how managers support and challenge staff to reflect on their practice and the support that they provide to foster carers in order to meet the needs of children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 49, paragraph 24.4)
- The registered person should ensure that there is clear and effective monitoring of all incidents that take place. They should ensure that their decision making

about all aspect of foster carers and children's lives is clearly documented and is completed in a timely manner. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.2)

- The registered person should ensure that thorough planning is completed to ensure the children move to a home where foster carers can meet their needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 23, paragraph 11.2)
- The registered person should ensure that all notifiable incidents are adequately recorded and reported to Ofsted in accordance with regulation 36. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 57, paragraph 29.1)
- The registered person should ensure that work is completed to support children to communicate and express their views, wishes and feelings. This should include following incidents where children have experienced restraint. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 8, paragraph 1.3)
- The registered person must ensure that written reports to the suitability of foster carers sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 29, paragraph 13.7)

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: SC036400

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