

Five Rivers Fostering Service

Five Rivers Child Care Limited

Unit 3, London Road Office Park, London Road, Salisbury, SP1 3HP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is one of five branches of a national not-for-profit agency. This branch, which covers the south of England, operates from its premises in Salisbury, Wiltshire. It offers a variety of placements, including parent and child, emergency, respite and long and short-term fostering placements.

The registered manager has been registered with Ofsted since 7 June 2022.

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 December 2024

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 **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of last inspection: 17 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are welcomed into this agency. They receive a welcome card when they move in with their carers. Participation opportunities, such as children developing and approving new children's guides, have been highlighted as a strength of this agency by all those spoken to. Carers and children see the value in how participation enhances children's lives, making them feel less isolated and part of a wider support network. The participation team is giving specific support around children's independence. This was requested by children and is now in action. Further evidencing the voice of the child being heard and responded to in a meaningful way.

Children make progress from their starting points. Children's progress is closely monitored and reviewed. Furthermore, children are exposed to enriching experiences and activities such as days out provided by the organisation.

Staff provide a personalised touch, such as individually selected presents for the children at their recent Christmas party. Children also receive a high level of care from their foster carers, who treat the children as members of their own family.

Foster carers are proactive and ambitious for the children in their care. For example, ensuring they have the right nursery provision that is best suited to meet their needs and seeking grants to purchase specialist equipment.

In times of crisis, workers and foster carers work well together to ensure the needs of the child and the carers are met. For example, carers have stayed by children's bedsides during hospital admissions and been supported to have time off work in order to be there for the child. Carers' dedication to children is strongly evident.

Staff are passionate about and committed to their work and the children and families who they support. Furthermore, the role of support workers is highly valued by carers and social workers alike.

'Staying put' arrangements are considered well in advance of a child's 18th birthday. Carers are encouraged to ask ongoing questions about the process and potential impact. There is a multi-agency approach to ensuring the arrangements are in the best interests of both the child and carer.

Foster carers are attracted to this agency due to the ethos of the company and the offer of therapeutic support for themselves as well as the children in their care. Carers found this to be realised once working for the agency and speak highly of the support available to them and children, including their birth children.

Assessments of perspective carers are thorough and analyse what the applicants can offer through the lens of fostering. All required references are sought to provide a clear overview of what the applicant can offer before going to panel. Carers reported

that Skills to Foster (the Fostering Network training) is of a high standard and have found this to be helpful.

Foster carers said that training is of a high standard and use the skills they have learned in practice. Therapeutic training, foetal alcohol syndrome disorder, parent and child and paediatric first-aid training were repeatedly mentioned as 'standout' training by carers.

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

Children newly placed with carers in this agency are closely monitored for the first six weeks by an internal team that views the placement through a therapeutic lens. This allows for any struggles to be identified at the earliest opportunity and a plan to be formulated to support the child and the foster family.

Beyond the first six weeks of placement, each child over 3 years of age receives screening assessments to understand their individual profile of needs. These are contributed to by a range of professionals and are often shared to evidence need and further support required. These are reviewed annually and provide measurable data to review the child's progress. This allows social workers to be proactive and engage with the right professionals to meet the identified support needs.

When there are challenges, work is done to understand and meet the needs of the child and their carers. This practice is well embedded, and the situation is reviewed weekly where needed. The team uses these meetings with the aim of being pre-emptive and highlighting anything that may require additional thought, such as a school transition, so bespoke support can be delivered in a timely manner.

There is a strong emphasis on learning from unplanned endings. By using the above-mentioned systems, there are clear processes in place to support children and carers through this experience. The process allows for reflection from all parties and is done in a way to be non-judgemental and focus on learning. While the process looks closely at the individual dynamics of the situation, work has also been undertaken to consider the bigger picture. There is clear analysis and breakdown of the reasons behind unplanned endings, and a picture is starting to be drawn about underlying issues and where resources are best focused. The agency managed to provide an internal move for 48% of the children who faced an unplanned ending, meaning that they could continue to be supported by social workers and support staff they were familiar with.

Allegations and concerns about standards of care are well managed. Investigations are timely and thorough. Carers are professionally challenged, where necessary, and supported to develop their skills to improve practice. Action plans are clear and set the expectations for next steps. However, it is not always clear in the recordings how the actions have been executed, nor do social workers consistently capture the foster carers' responses to the concerns and proposed actions. This could be helpful at a later date if further allegations or concerns are raised.

The agency operates an out-of-hours service with combined areas within the national organisation. Management understanding of how carers access and experience this service could be strengthened, as there were a small number of examples of foster carers not being able to reach someone via the out-of-hours line. However, overall feedback from carers was positive as to the availability of workers when they needed them.

Safer care plans are in place for children and families. These are of varying quality and are not consistently updated in line with the emerging needs of the child, nor do they correlate with other safeguarding documents. The agency has recently developed new documents to better capture the detail of the risk and how this is to be mitigated; however, this is not yet fully embedded.

Responses to safeguarding concerns are robust with good oversight. Leaders and managers work well with partner agencies and make appropriate referrals when necessary to keep children safe.

Restrictive practices were found to be used by carers without a clear risk assessment being in place. There are currently no systems set up to monitor and review these practices to ensure the appropriateness and proportionality of the restriction.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Management oversight is discontinuous and poorly reflected within the recordings. For example, over four consecutive months, carers supervision records cited a lack of management availability as the reason meetings had not progressed. There was insufficient management oversight of these records to recognise and address this issue. Case records do not always accurately reflect the current situation for the child and their foster family. However, social workers and foster carers shared that they have regular contact with leaders and managers, who are approachable and readily accessible to them.

Staff supervision occurs regularly and is prioritised by managers. However, there is little evidence of professional challenge and direction for staff recorded in the files. Expectations for time frames are not recorded and not revisited or challenged at the next supervision. Equally, case discussions with social workers are not captured in the carers files, and therefore it is difficult to see the management oversight in each case.

The agency receives few complaints, having received none in the last 12 months. Of the one looked at, the complaint process was followed in a timely manner, the agency met with the complainant and advised them of the outcome. However, there is recognition that the outcomes of complaints could be shared sooner with carers when they are not the complainants. Similarly, although not relevant in the case sampled, the manager acknowledged that there is no policy in place for sharing outcomes with children where appropriate, as this is often done on a case-by-case basis depending on the circumstances.

Staff enjoy working here. They value the opportunity they have for regular reflective practice, which is prioritised by the agency. Staff consistently reported managers to be supportive and available to them, and the team as a whole can be relied on and work towards a shared goal.

Panel members offer a diversity and richness to the panel. Questions posed to carers are considered and appropriate, providing robust scrutiny. There are good quality assurance processes in place, and feedback is two-way. While working for the organisation, the agency decision-maker covers a different region, and this creates some distance and independence and offers further scrutiny.

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, The 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. Also, where there are restrictive practices in place, these must be well documented, monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure they are proportionate and appropriate to meet the child's needs.</p>	30 January 2025

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. In particular, ensure sound management oversight of social workers and foster carers, with agreed actions recorded to maintain standards and prevent actions from being missed or overlooked. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)

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: SC036261

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Registered provider address: Five Rivers Childcare, 47 Bedwin Street, Salisbury
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Responsible individual: Jacob Strydom

Registered manager: Kate Ennis

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Inspectors

Katie Ratcliffe, Social Care Inspector

Hannah Spencer-Townsend, Social Care Inspector

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