

Five Rivers Family Placement Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Joanna Moore
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Five Rivers fostering is part of a large organisation providing residential and foster care. The branch at 306 Green lane has 22 carers on its book providing care and support to 21 children.

Summary

This was an announced inspection carried out as part of the annual inspection program. The focus of the inspection was on the care of sibling groups. As part of the inspection visits were made to the branch offices to review files and speak with office based staff. The inspector met three carers. Questionnaires were sent to young people, foster carers and other stakeholders.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency continues maintain good standards in four of the five outcome areas.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency has clear systems in place to ensure the health and welfare needs of the children are met. Children have received the appropriate vaccinations, health checks and have visited the dentist and optician. The children's health is monitored by the 'looked after children nurse' and where appropriate the health visitor. Carers monthly supervisions and monthly summaries review the health situation of the children. Placing social workers say that carers manage the children's health needs well. They are confident that carers are able to deal with emergency access to health professionals. Young people say they are supported in learning about keeping healthy through diet and exercise. Carers feel well supported, however one carer felt they would benefit from more support specifically in relation to nutritional management issues.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The people managing the service have been working at the agency for some years, both the manager and responsible individual were deemed suitable people by the previous regulating body. The agency has clear systems in place to recruit suitable carers and staff. The checks and processes carried out are in line with regulatory requirements and current good practice. The carer recruitment examines in depth, using the BAFF competency based assessment, the carers ability to support children and young people . The agency checks the criminal records of any adults living in the home and any regular visitors. Children are matched to carers who have as close a background as is possible. For example, the child is matched to carers who share the same racial, cultural, religious and linguistic back ground where possible or to the nearest match where it is not. Children are placed with carers in accordance with their believed competence but not always within the approved age ranges. Such 'emergency' placements have not always been presented at the next panel for their approval category to be changed. The agency identified this some time ago through its quality assurance panel processes and has ensured that this was a single event. Carers are provided with sufficient information to provide care to young people before they are placed. Panel processes are clear and serve to safeguard young

people. Risk assessments are in place for the young people, these review their vulnerability and any risks they present to others. The agency ensures carers and young people have individual household safe care guidelines in place to safeguard carers and young people. The health and safety of the carers house is checked annually. Carers are required to demonstrate that their cars are roadworthy and adequately insured. The agency has clear child protection procedures which are known to staff and carers. Carers undertake child protection training, however, not all carers update this training regularly. The agency takes appropriate action where children's welfare is at risk through immediately notifying placing authorities and or Ofsted of any concerns. The agency has clear systems to de-register carers if appropriate. Young people say they feel safe living with their carers ' I live in a loving family'. Placing authorities state that the carers keep the young people safe.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Matching of children is carried out very carefully, securing the best match for the child which promotes the child's development of identity. Where carers have particular skills or attributes these are borne in mind when making placements. The agency is based in a multicultural area of East London, the panel is conducted in an area with a very different demographic make up. The panel is not reflective of the diversity of the carers presented. This is reflected when carers are presented to panel by some of the questions asked of prospective carers. The agency works in partnership with education agencies to secure good educational outcomes for children and young people. Carers monthly supervisions and monthly summaries review the educational progress of the children. Children are supported by their carers to attend school regularly and achieve good grades. The children reviewed are doing excellently at school. Young people say 'I get help with my education'... 'my foster mum talks to me about my education.' 'I am helped to think about my future'. Placing authorities say ' Five Rivers is fully conversant with the after school activities for each child. Whenever difficulties arise they put in additional support to stabilise placements and maintain continuity for children'. Young people benefit from a wealth of out of school activities such as violin lessons, dancing classes, swimming, cinema, sports, church, drama club as well as the daily activities of shopping and playing on their bicycles.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Carers demonstrate a clear commitment to maintaining the regular and complex contact arrangements with young people's families. Carers state that the importance of maintaining contact is clearly guided by the agency. Carers would like more support in facilitating contact arrangements such as the provision of support workers, who are available to escort the children to and from contact. Five Rivers are aware of the benefits of this service and are looking into providing such support. Financial support is however currently available for carers to independently organise additional support where required. Young people say carers consult with them on a day-to day basis about their care and planning their future. The agency demonstrates that it seeks to feedback the views of young people to the placing authority. All young people are encouraged to take an active part in their looked after children (LAC) reviews. The agency has a clear complaints procedure which is known to both carers and young people. The organisation is reviewing ways in which it can effectively encourage young people to have a say in the development of the fostering service as a whole.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency has clear systems in place to support young people in developing skills in preparation for adulthood and independent living. Placing social workers say 'the carers are committed to helping them manage their own money and developing independence skills in line with the Leaving Care Act'. All carers are required to save a specified minimum amount from the children's money into a savings plan. When the child moves on to independent living or another placement this money goes with them. Carers benefit from the reliable regular monthly payment of the carers allowance. The amount paid is clear and carers say any queries are quickly addressed.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The agency has been operated and managed by the same individuals for a number of years. These individuals were registered and approved as 'fit' to manage the agency by the previous registering body. The manager has worked as the manager for the past six years and is suitably qualified and experienced. Carers and placing agencies feel that this is a well managed agency. The agency has a clear and useful guide to the services available. The agency is well resourced and provided with appropriate facilities to carry out its day to day business. The building is safely maintained and there are clear systems in place to store records securely. Financial processes are managed at the organisation head office, however, there is no evidence to suggest that the agency is not financially viable. The agency has sufficient staff to respond to the day to day running of the agency. All the carers and placing authorities spoke highly of the staff. A clear management system is in place. The manager receives regular professional supervision and the link workers receive regular supervision from the manager. An appraisal system is in place but not all staff have had an appraisal within the past year. Link workers are qualified social workers who have worked for the organisation for a number of years. An induction process is in place however no new staff have been recruited within the past three years. The link workers each support a maximum of ten carers. There is no clear formal plan for the training and development of staff. Training identified by staff may be funded but the impetus is left very much to the individual. Training and professional development or the setting of clear training goals for staff is not given a high priority. There are insufficient systems in place for the effective dissemination of national changes in policy. The agency has a clear strategy for working with carers. For example where circumstances within a foster family mean that the foster carer may have a temporary difficulty in fostering, perhaps due to ill health, additional support is provided. Each foster family is provided with two weeks paid holiday per year with the option of double pay if they choose not to use this service. Field social workers visit the carers every four weeks. There are systems in place to carry out unannounced visits to carers but not all carers have had such a visit within the past twelve months. Such visits are important to safeguard the young people's welfare. Carers are given 24 hour telephone support and workers give practical support as well as advice when required. Foster carers say they feel well supported by the agency. All carers before being approved, undertake the 'Choosing to Foster Training' covering all aspects of care to a set standard. The agency provides a wealth of training to foster carers including child protection, first aid, diversity, attachment theory, food hygiene and de escalation skills. Carers vary greatly on how much training they undertake, for some carers there is no evidence that they have undertaken basic training updates in key areas such as child protection for some time. Carers are offered the opportunity of undertaking NVQ in

working with young people. Carers say the agency is very responsive to training needs identified by carers.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure carers undertake updates on safeguarding at least every three years (NMS 9)
- provide the panel with diversity training or ensure a more diverse panel membership (NMS 7)
- ensure a clear plan for the training and professional development of all staff (NMS 19)
- ensure all staff have an appraisal yearly. (NMS20)
- ensure that unannounced visits to carers are carried out (NMS22)
- ensure carers attend the wealth of updating training available (NMS23)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.