

Five Rivers Family Placement Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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 Family Placement Service is an Independent Fostering Agency which operates from six branches across the country and in Ireland. The head office is at Fordingbridge in Hampshire. This inspection is of the main branch of the Family Placement Service, based in Salisbury, with a sub-office in Fordingbridge. This branch currently provides 76 placements within a 40-mile radius of Salisbury and has 90 approved fostering households. The Salisbury branch has its offices within the Farrington Centre Special School, which is a Five Rivers service. The Family Placement Service also links closely with the management team of the Five Rivers Children's Homes. The service provides placements for children and young people with varying needs, including children with a severe disability, parent and child, and also sibling placements. Carers are recruited for long term, permanency, short term and respite care. Both practical and emotional support systems are in place to maintain these placements, with supervision visits to carers being task focused and frequent. Various support groups for carers are run, including a children who foster support group and one for carers who look after children with a disability. Children, young people and carers further receive the services of family support workers and a psychotherapist. A structured and full training programme is offered to foster carers and staff which includes in house training and training provided by external national organisations. Over half of the carers have achieved at least an NVQ 3 in caring for children and young people.

Summary

This key inspection was carried out by one inspector over three days. The purpose of the inspection was to ensure that the service is continuing to meet the National Minimum Standards and regulations for Fostering Services. It was a proportionate inspection, focusing on new placements made within the last year, especially young people who had transferred between one Five Rivers foster carer to another. This meant that previous requirements and recommendations made about the service not obtaining sufficient information about children's needs, behaviours and risks prior to placement could be reassessed. The inspection involved visiting two fostering households, examining their case files in detail as well as the files of another foster carer. Four young person's files were also examined in detail, and the inspector also met with one young person. Foster carers were interviewed during one of their support groups, and a staff team meeting was observed. The deputy national fostering manager, registered manager and a supervising social worker were also interviewed. A number of further records were examined, including information on child protection allegations and complaints made to the service. Questionnaires were sent to foster carers, young people and placing social workers prior to the inspection. Ten were received back from foster carers, four from young people and five from placing social workers. The service is committed to providing a high quality service. The service aims to exceed the national minimum standards, and is achieving this in a number of areas. It is a professional and efficient service, ensuring that good outcomes are achieved for children and young people placed with its foster carers.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Where previous shortfalls have been identified through inspection, the management have addressed these promptly and with conviction. All the requirements made at the previous

inspection have been complied with, and seven out of the nine previous recommendations have been fully met. There is now firm procedures in place which ensure that foster carers and supervising social workers obtain the known information about a child or young person's background prior to placement. Referrals and placement decisions include detailed matching and consideration of the needs of the child and foster carer's family. Risk assessments and safe care plans are consistently developed and agreed to ensure that placements will be safe for all. The new administrative system for supporting supervising social workers to carry out annual reviews of carers is working effectively. Further systems have also been developed to support supervising social workers in their work, including updating paperwork to include the every child matters framework and having matching proformas that allow for more meaningful and detailed information about the child's needs to be considered. Further improvements have been made to foster panel minutes, organisation of files, and case recording in general which leads to more factual, easily accessible and relevant information being recorded.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Five Rivers Family Placement Service in Salisbury actively promotes the health of the children and young people placed with their carers. There are very good systems set up to monitor the health of the young people, with carers required to complete designated forms for all health appointments attended and all medication administered. Supervising social workers discuss the health outcomes for young people at each supervision session, and this is recorded well. Foster carers also complete monthly summaries noting how the health of the children and young people has been promoted, and addressed where necessary. The health needs of children and young people is clearly recorded and obtained, being included on the referral and matching forms completed prior to placement. The children and young people also have up to date health assessments and plans, with foster carers and supervising social workers having copies of these. This again ensures good monitoring and identification of health needs. Consent for foster carers to give emergency or first aid medical treatment to young people is not always obtained prior to the start of placements. Supervising social workers do however make many attempts to obtain this from placing authorities. Children and young people receive routine health checks, including dental and optical, as well as receiving full support with specialist health needs, for example mental health or occupational therapy. Supervising social workers also advocate well for young people, ensuring they receive the health support necessary. This includes arranging music therapy and play therapy. A psychotherapist works part time with the family placement service, providing direct support to foster carers, supervising social workers and children and young people around emotional issues such as attachment difficulties, behaviour disorders. Support from the psychotherapist is prompt and considered to be a very valuable service by the foster carers. Supervising social workers further confirm that the understanding of emotional health issues of looked after children by the service helps to support foster carers through difficult times and to maintain placement stability. Foster carers, young people and placing social workers are generally very positive about the support given to the children and young people to be healthy.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and Young People have security, stability and are well cared for. Children and young people reported in the returned questionnaires that they always feel well cared for in their

foster placement. They further stated that they had someone to speak to if they were unhappy. The fostering service is good at ensuring young people are protected from abuse and neglect. Significant improvements have been made to ensure that the necessary information about a young person's needs is obtained prior to placement, to ensure that all risks are known and managed appropriately. This better protects the young person and others from potential harm. Where a child protection issue arises robust child protection procedures are followed promptly, with local authorities contacted promptly and professionally by the fostering agency. Staff and carers have all received training in child protection and child abuse. The registered manager has a clear understanding of the latest good practice guidance on managing allegations and concerns against foster carers, and policies are currently being developed to encapsulate this latest guidance. However, the written records made following child protection allegations, complaints and other significant events do not include a clear record of the outcome of the investigation. Although individual staff are clear about the outcome of investigations this is not accurately recorded on foster carers files, or included in the monitoring records kept by the manager. There are currently two on going child protection investigations concerning allegations against foster carers. The agency has appropriately liaised with the investigating agency to ensure children are protected. There have been no complaints made about the agency since the last inspection. The management and staff are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare. The management team, including the registered manager and deputy national fostering manager, are provided with the opportunity for further training that ensures they have the skills and experience necessary for managing the fostering service. Although references and criminal record bureau checks are routinely obtained for new staff, the recruitment procedures have not fully followed good practice in safeguarding children and young people. Verification of why the persons previous employment where they have worked with children had ended had not been sought. The management team began to address this shortfall during the inspection. To ensure foster carers homes are free from hazards, supervising social workers undertake regular health and safety checks of the homes and ensure that the transport used for children is safe. Additional safety equipment is also provided promptly, for example stair gates and car seats. Each fostering household has a safe care plan, detailing how the carers intend to keep the child protected and safe within the home. These are updated regularly and are individualised for each child who is placed with the carers. Risk assessments are now routinely completed when a child or young person moves into a fostering placement. Although risks such as absconding, criminal behaviour and aggression are identified, the assessments are not detailed enough to provide sufficient guidance on how to manage the risks. For example a risk assessment for a young person who absconds does not specify how often the young person absconds, for how long, or where the young person goes when they abscond. Matching children and young people's needs to a carer capable of meeting the needs is very well considered. A record of matching is completed for each child and young person, which details a range of needs and behaviours. A record is then made of how a proposed carer can meet these needs. Placing social workers are provided with up to date information about carers, and matching is discussed openly. The fostering panel adds an additional safeguard to the service, ensuring foster carers are suitable people to provide quality placements to children and young people. Panel minutes evidenced that first reviews, changes in approval status and assessments are being brought to panel. Panel members are actively questioning carers abilities and commitments where appropriate and offering an independent view of the suitability of carers. Supervising social workers and the agencies decision maker further clarified that the panel is effective and efficient.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Good educational outcomes for children and young people are being achieved by the fostering service having committed and proactive foster carers who prioritise education. Placing social workers state that the educational needs of the children are being well met by carers, with one social worker describing foster carers as excelling themselves at providing a nurturing home where education is encouraged. Foster carers visited were well aware of the local 'high achieving schools' and advocated for the children to attend these schools. Eighty percent of the young people whose last placement was with the fostering service achieved between one and five GCSE passes at grade A* - G, and this is higher than the national average for looked after children. All but one of the young people over 16 years are in further education, which again reflects the good support given to the young people to value education and achievement. Education attendance is monitored, and supervision sessions with carers focus on how the educational needs of children and young people are being met. All but one young person are attending school regularly which demonstrates that risk of exclusions or truancing is generally managed effectively. Foster carers and supervising social workers attend education meetings. Although systems are set up to monitor the educational attainment of young people (key stage results) the supervising social workers are not routinely utilising these systems in practice, and few have made contact with designated teachers or local authority educational officers for looked after children. The same number of foster carers considered the agency gives 'satisfactory' support in promoting educational needs, than the number that considered it 'outstanding' or 'good'. Improvement plans are in place to ensure a higher quality of educational support is given. This includes having the Head Teacher of the Five Rivers Special School providing consultation, training and advice to the fostering agency on educational issues. Children and young people are achieving good personal and social development and enjoy outstanding opportunities for recreation. Children and young people are engaged in meaningful activities out of school. Supervising social workers advocate for funding for these activities from the placing authorities where appropriate.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service is good at promoting contact for a child or young person with family and friends. Contact arrangements are made clear at the start of placements, through referral documentation, matching checklists, placements meetings, and placement plans. Supervising social workers ensure that contact plans are understood by foster carers and the young people, and they provide extra resources where needed to ensure that contact arrangements are carried through for the children and young people. The supervising social workers use their knowledge and understanding of attachment issues to support carers with any difficult relationship issues the child or young person may have. Consultation and participation by young people is being encouraged, with the fostering service valuing the views and opinions of children and young people. Foster carer reviews include the views of children and young people. The family support workers also build up close relationships with children and young people and they clearly advocate and help children speak up about important issues. Five Rivers have written to young people inviting them along to participation events. All of the foster carers consulted stated that the service is 'outstanding' or 'good' in involving children and young people in decisions that affect them. The majority of young people further confirmed that their foster carers 'always' listen to them and take notice of their opinions.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

These standards were not assessed at this inspection.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide. Children and young people also receive a welcome pack about the fostering service, which is informative and clearly written. The service effectively meets its aims and objectives, and reviews and monitors its practice accordingly. Foster carers and children and young people benefit considerably from a service that is managed by managers who have appropriate skills and experience. The registered manager has a wealth of experience and exercises effective leadership that delivers the best possible child care. Assessments, approvals, supervision and reviews of carers are all undertaken within appropriate timescales. The systems and structures in place are reviewed and monitored regularly to ensure they continue to be effective. The records made of supervision with carers are of very good quality, as are the monthly summaries that foster carers themselves complete. The written records of the annual reviews do range from excellent to limited in quality, and the manager is currently addressing this through auditing of files. Foster carers receive a good level of support and supervision by the supervising social workers, which contributes to carers developing their skills and meeting the needs of children and young people. Foster carers state that support is excellent and only positive comments are made about the supervising social workers. Placing social workers also value the support by the fostering service, especially where placements are unstable. The family support workers role is considerably valued, and helps to maintain placements for the benefit of the child or young person. Foster carers are further supported by accessible respite care when needed, support groups, drop ins and a well run out of hours service. Foster carer events are also regularly organised, showing value and recognition to foster carers hard work. Training for foster carers is also excellent, with a dedicated programme which is regular, varied and of a good quality provided to all carers. There is very good administrative practice and procedures. Case records for carers and children include all significant information required by regulation. If read by the child or young person it will allow them to have a clear understanding of their time with Five Rivers foster carers. Records are legible and factually written. Files are very well organised and stored securely. Files do lack a clear list of the children and young people that have been placed with carers, which will make monitoring of the care provided by those carers difficult over time.

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 |
|----------|---|----------------|
| 15 | ensure that where a person has previously worked in a position whose duties involved work with children or vulnerable adults, | 13 August 2007 |

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| | so far as reasonably practicable, verification of the reason why the employment or position ended is obtained and recorded clearly on the personnel file (Regulation 20, Schedule 1). | |
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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):

- develop risk assessments further to ensure that they identify more detail about the risks presented and how these risks are to managed on a day to day basis.
- ensure that the records kept of any significant events including complaints, allegations and accidents clearly identify the investigation process and outcome.
- provide a clear record on the foster carer's case file, not just on the annual review documentation, that records the name, age and sex of each child placed with the carers, the dates the placement began and the circumstances of why it ended.

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.