



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Five Rivers Family Placement Services

**Belmont School
School Lane
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP1 3TA**

Lead Inspector
Martin Davis

Announced Inspection
17th October 2005 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

| Reader Information | |
|---------------------|---|
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

| | |
|---|--|
| Name of service | Five Rivers Family Placement Services |
| Address | Belmont School School Lane Salisbury Wiltshire SP1 3TA |
| Telephone number | 01722 421142 |
| Fax number | 01722 421144 |
| Email address | |
| Provider Web address | www.five-rivers.org |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | Five Rivers Consortium (Family Placement) Limited |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | Mrs Caroline Anne Kerley |
| Type of registration | Fostering Agencies |
| No. of places registered (if applicable) | 0 |
| Category(ies) of registration, with number of places | |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 30th September 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Five Rivers Family Placement Service is an Independent Fostering Agency operating 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 90 placements within a 40-mile radius of Salisbury.

The Salisbury branch shares an office with Belmont School, a registered EBD school that fostered children can access.

Five Rivers Family Placement Service places a strong emphasis on providing sibling placements and at the time of the inspection they were providing a number of multiple placements for sibling groups. The service provides placements for children with a disability and mother and baby assessments. Both practical and emotional support systems are in place to maintain these placements.

There is a play therapist within the team and three other therapists are contracted to work with children who are fostered.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection lasted three days and was completed by two inspectors. The registered manager and National Fostering manager were interviewed, an inspector met with a group of carers and a separate group of staff, two carers were interviewed in their own home's and children placed were also interviewed. Placing social workers were telephoned following the inspection and children's birth family members given the lead inspectors contact details. Case files and policies and procedures were read.

What the service does well:

The staff within the family placement team are experienced and skilled practitioners and this is reflected in the quality of assessments and support offered to foster carers. Children placed have made very positive comments about the service they have received; one young person wrote *"Being where I am now is the best place I have ever lived and Five Rivers is the best helpers around if I didn't have their support I probably wouldn't be where I am today."*

The management of the agency is effective and ensures that ongoing service improvements are made. The agency works in partnership with placing authorities, takes child protection concerns seriously and has developed an open working relationship with the Commission.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Training programmes for both staff and carers have now been formalised. The appointment of a training co-ordinator has helped to ensure that high quality internal training is available and enabled relevant external resources to be identified and commissioned. These programmes have led to improved outcomes for both carers and children, one carer commented how training provided had helped her to understand the foster child for the first time.

Respite information packs are a significant new development leading to greater information sharing between respite and full-time carer. Access to health care and education professionals has improved.

What they could do better:

With continued growth the agency must clarify the future management arrangements for the two offices currently included in this fostering branch.

Greater care must be taken to ensure that senior managers' receive the support and supervision that they require and arrangements to establish a second fostering panel must be concluded successfully.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

Additional systems have been developed in the last twelve months that serve to protect and promote children's health and development.

EVIDENCE:

Following the last inspection individual health records have been developed. One copy is placed on the young person's file and a second is held by the foster carer who takes responsibility for updating the record. Supervising social worker's monitor this record through three-weekly supervision with the foster carer. The agency expects placing authorities to share health information prior to placement, in some cases limited information has been made available; here supervising social workers were seen to be writing to placing authorities to chase this information. Each carer is expected to write a monthly summary that is shared with the placing authority; these include an ongoing assessment of health needs. The quality of these monthly summaries varied considerably between carers. In the last twelve months additional policy and guidance has been developed in relation to the administration of medication designed to prevent any incidents of secondary dispensing. A new Respite Information Pack has been designed and circulated to carers; the aim is to ensure that appropriate information is shared between a young person's respite and their main carer.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The agency's recruitment procedures for both staff and carers are robust so that it establishes an individual's fitness to work with or care for children. Developments are required in some areas to ensure that best practice in this area is maintained.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has robust personnel procedures in place to ensure that relevant references are sought prior to the appointment of managers. A spreadsheet system is in place to bring forward three-yearly checks for all managers.

During a carer's initial assessment a health and safety check of their home is completed, this is updated on an annual basis. Foster carer health and safety responsibilities are set out in the Foster Care Handbook. Home's visited during the inspection were warm and well maintained.

In cases tracked careful matching had taken place, in one where limited referral information was available the registered manager was consulted and level of risk assessed. In each of these cases additional supports to compensate for potential gaps in matching had been identified however these were not then specified in the placement agreement. In one case a placement had been made despite considerable risk of disruption, this risk had been

recognised and all relevant professionals consulted. The use of new Respite Information Packs has improved the matching process for respite placements; the use of carbonated diary sheets has simplified the process of communication between the carers involved. Carers reported not being pressurised to taking placements and being encouraged to think about referrals before making any commitments. Carers interviewed also reported that they believed that Five Rivers shares all relevant information about children placed.

A rolling programme of foster carer training is in place, this includes workshops on safe care, working with sexual abuse, and working with children and young people on protection. The agency is also negotiating with the NSPCC to provide training for carers who look after children who display sexualised behaviour. Safe care policies were found on carer files, some were appropriately detailed and personalised whilst others remained generic statements.

Personnel files were clearly structured and contained evidence of the required personal and professional references for new employees; there is a record of telephone enquiries to follow up written references and a system to ensure that CRB's are renewed on a three yearly basis. In one case the agency had accepted a reference from an applicant's previous colleague, when in fact it would have been more appropriate to request a reference from a manager or a personnel officer.

Foster panel now includes an independent member who was previously placed with foster carers. A panel training day was held in December 2004 and members of panel have attended the residential skills to foster introductory training. Minutes demonstrate that panel are approached for advice where social workers have identified complex issues, the chair of panel has attended service manager team meetings to provide quality assurance feedback to the agency, this information could be included in an annual report from panel to further improve quality assurance measures. The foster panel currently serves more than the permitted three 'branches'; Five Rivers is currently recruiting members to a new panel that will then operate from Cheltenham/the Midlands.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The agency has developed additional services in the past year that demonstrates its awareness of diversity and anti-discriminatory issues. Educational supports have also been improved so that the agency has a greater awareness of the educative needs of children placed.

EVIDENCE:

In the past year the agency had commissioned the Fostering Network to run a two-day valuing diversity workshop for staff, the trainer concluded "*the agency had a personal and professional commitment to promoting anti-discriminatory practice.*" Two carers and their supervising social worker attended a second Fostering Network workshop on 'Caring for Black Children' and the agency had also identified training for a carer who is looking after a lone asylum seeker, this training had been cancelled on three occasions by the training organisation. Additional supports had been identified for the young person seeking asylum including access to an interpreter, educational supports and contact with a family reflecting her ethnic and cultural background.

The majority of the children placed within the agency are in mainstream schooling but the agency also has access to the Five Rivers Belmont School if this is more appropriate. SEN Statements, Individual and Personal Education Plans were found on file. A teacher from the Belmont School now works for the agency one day a week, she is developing comprehensive education records for each young person from which the agency will be able to monitor individual educational achievement and provide support and advice to carers.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The agency clearly recognises the importance of contact arrangements for children placed, it facilitates and monitors these arrangements closely. Whilst it has begun to develop consultation systems more work is required to ensure that young people's views are heard and taken into account.

EVIDENCE:

Through case tracking evidence was seen of the priority that is attached to contact arrangements. Practical and emotional support is provided to carers to enable them to manage high frequency, complex and difficult contact arrangements. Foster carers are expected to record their perception of the impact of contact; this information is fed back to the placing social worker through monthly summary sheets. 87% of placing social workers reported in questionnaires that carers worked very well, or well, with members of a child's family.

Foster carers are expected to seek out and feedback children and young people's opinions, 92% of young people reported through the pre-inspection questionnaire that their foster carer often or sometimes asked them for their opinion or ideas. Young people are consulted at the point of their carer's annual review and the comments or pictures they have drawn are attached to the review. In their regular supervision visits to carer's, supervising social workers consider any issues that arise about each child and they then also provide a link to the placing social worker. The agency has begun to consider how more formal consultation systems might be developed so that children and young people are encouraged to comment upon the quality of service provided by the agency, but more work is required before effective systems are developed.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers reported that allowances are paid on time. The agency has systems in place to ensure that carers are paid promptly even where a local authority may have been slow to make a payment. Carers requested that more information be added to each pay advice so that they are able to audit payments.

Management

The intended outcomes 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)
- 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)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

Foster carer and staff training programmes are good and have led to measurable improvements in service delivery, the agency is commended for its work in these areas. In general the management of the agency through the registered manager and her team of senior practitioners is effective, managers know what is happening within placements and are clearly able to influence practice within the agency. If the current high quality of practice is to be maintained the agency must develop clear and extended management arrangements as the agency continues to grow.

EVIDENCE:

The Registered Manager has now completed a Certificate in Health and Social Services Management (with Merit) in addition to an NVQ Level IV in Management and NVQ Level IV Registered Managers Award.

The registered manager has developed systems to ensure that the matters set out in Schedule 7 are monitored and that notifications are made to relevant agencies in line with Schedule 8, notifications to the Commission are now made without delay. The manager monitors these records on a monthly basis to identify trends or patterns, but also reviews any significant incident at the time it is reported to identify whether additional action is required. The manager also reviews all foster carer monthly summaries and foster carer supervision records so that she has a comprehensive overview of the progress of placements.

The agency has a main office in Salisbury and a sub-office in Fordingbridge. At the last inspection the agency was advised to run the Fordingbridge office as a sub-office for a further twelve months so that a more accurate assessment could be made of whether this sub-office constitutes a separate branch that will require separate registration and inspection. Many of the core functions of a branch are covered in the sub-office such as support (including separate support groups), training (shared), assessment, reviews and recruitment. Whilst the practice manager at Fordingbridge can influence day-to-day decision-making the Registered Manager retains overall responsibility for the office. Since the last inspection the Registered Manager has dropped some of her wider service development responsibilities enabling her to commit more time to managing the two offices and in the short-term this enables the Fordingbridge office to continue to operate as a sub-office. However given the projected growth of the service it is likely that the two offices will operate more independently of one another and it will become increasingly unrealistic to expect a single Registered Manager to have responsibility for both, in this event registration as a branch will be required. The agency is due to review its management arrangements following this inspection and have agreed to inform the Commission of how they will ensure that appropriate management arrangements are in place for each office in the future.

In addition to the Registered Manager and the Fordingbridge Practice Manager there are 4 senior practitioners, 9 social workers, 5 support workers and 6 administrative workers. This is consistent with the Statement of Purpose, enables social workers to carry relatively small caseloads supporting up to 12 families and assessing up to 2 applicants. Staff felt that caseloads were manageable and enabled them to offer high levels of support to carers. The addition of a dedicated foster panel administrator in the last year has helped to ensure that panel business is organised efficiently. Assessments read were

good reflecting the considerable skills and experience of this team of social workers; assessments are updated as a carer becomes more experienced. In one case where a variation to a carer's approval was required at short-notice the National Fostering Manager had agreed to this after consultation with the panel chair, this was inappropriate, as no member of the fostering panel should take part in any decision made by the agency regarding the terms of a carers approval. This was not a deliberate breach of the regulations and the agency has identified alternative procedures to ensure this is not repeated.

A part-time training co-ordinator is in post. He has developed a training pathway for family placement staff that includes supporting unqualified staff through DIPSW and on-going professional development for experienced social workers. Staff reported that access to training is good, in the past twelve months this has included BAAF Form F Assessment and Supporting Foster Carer's training, Attachment Style Interview training, Valuing Diversity and Black Children in Care workshops. Three members of staff are enrolled on the Post Qualifying Level 1 programme and three are training to become NVQ Assessors. The foster panel chair in his feedback to the Service Manager Group commented upon the improved quality of assessments possibly as a result of the quality of training offered. The training co-ordinator has produced an evaluation of the training programme for 2004-5 and uses this to inform future training plans. There are no social workers currently enrolled on the Post Qualifying Level II programme, clarification of the support available through 'backfill' would be useful.

Regular team meetings are held, including a monthly meeting involving both offices. Policies and procedures have been revised and circulated to all staff, errors were found in these and further revision is needed. Staff have regular supervision, the quality of notes varied but in some cases these were excellent providing clear action plans that had been regularly audited. A database has been developed to track staff appraisals; this showed that annual appraisals are completed with the exception of the Registered Manager and the National Fostering Manager whose appraisals were considerably out of date.

77% of carers reported in the pre-inspection questionnaire that they felt very well, or well supported; no carers said they did not receive enough support. Typical comments made by carers include *"they're always there when you need them (and are) non-judgemental when you make mistakes"*, *"The support worker will go out of her way to assist. Her help is at times beyond words"*. Carer's are visited a minimum of once every three weeks, in many cases this is exceeded. Carer supervision notes were detailed; these are reviewed by the Registered Manager. Carers have access to regular respite where appropriate, and support workers provide a responsive service that is valued by carers. 86% of foster carer annual reviews had been completed, an independent social worker had been commissioned to help with the backlog but some carers had not had an annual review for a considerable amount of time, in one case not since December 2003.

A revised Foster Carer Agreement had been circulated to carers, however as carers had been asked to fill-in the terms of their approval and mistakes found, the agency needs to audit these agreements. Case files demonstrated that carer's receive an annual unannounced visit, these visits are audited at annual review. 86% of children reported that they had been told how to make a complaint. Complaints investigations were found to be sensitive and thorough, however in some cases an adequate record had not been maintained. The complaints procedure needs further revision, it refers to a complaints person when in fact no individual has been nominated for this role and doesn't set out how complaints against the registered person will be handled.

A foster carer training pathway has been developed and is supported by a comprehensive monthly workshop programme for carers. Carers reported that they valued training and were provided with practical support to enable them to attend workshops. Carers are expected to attend a minimum of three workshops each year; this is monitored through supervision and annual review. Carers had been able to access specific external training and are encouraged to enrol upon the NVQ Level III programme, some carers are being trained as NVQ assessors. A Children Who Foster Group has been established and recently participated in a workshop with children who are looked after; one young person has been supported to attend a POW WOW peer-mentoring workshop.

Separate case files are opened for each child placed; these were well structured and maintained. Carers are expected to help children to understand their complex histories with the collection of appropriate memorabilia and photograph albums.

Comprehensive administrative records are kept. Archived records are currently filed in the roof space, these were not inspected. A record of investigations in to complaints, the conclusion reached, and any action taken was not found to be recorded appropriately on all relevant staff files.

The agency now has a set of procedures to deal with situations of financial crisis including disclosure to placing authorities. An independent auditors report, ratified by the board in April 2005 demonstrates that the agency has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations. The Director and a Chartered Accountant monitor accounts at their monthly meeting.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

| BEING HEALTHY | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 12 | 3 |

| STAYING SAFE | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 3 | 3 |
| 6 | 3 |
| 8 | 3 |
| 9 | 3 |
| 15 | 3 |
| 30 | 2 |

| ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING | |
|------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 7 | 3 |
| 13 | 3 |
| 31 | N/A |

| MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 10 | 4 |
| 11 | 2 |

| ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING | |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 14 | N/A |
| 29 | 3 |

| MANAGEMENT | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 1 | X |
| 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 2 |
| 5 | X |
| 16 | X |
| 17 | 3 |
| 18 | X |
| 19 | 4 |
| 20 | 2 |
| 21 | 2 |
| 22 | 2 |
| 23 | 4 |
| 24 | 3 |
| 25 | 2 |
| 26 | X |
| 27 | 3 |
| 28 | 3 |
| 32 | N/A |

Yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

| No. | Standard | Regulation | Requirement | Timescale for action |
|-----|----------|---------------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1 | FS5 | S11(2) CSA 8 (1)(a) | Inform the Commission of the future management arrangements for the Salisbury branch and its sub-office in Fordingbridge | 31/03/06 |
| 2 | FS17 | 28(4) | No member of the agency's fostering panel shall take part in any decision made by the agency in relation to a carer's terms of approval | 30/11/05 |
| 3 | FS20 | 21(4)(a) | Fostering service provider must ensure that senior managers have their performance appraised annually | 31/01/06 |
| 4 | FS21 | 29(2) | All foster carers should have a review of their approval at intervals of no more than a year | 31/01/06 |
| 5 | FS30 | 24(5) | The fostering panel may be established by any two but not more than three branches | 31/01/06 |

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

| No. | Refer to Standard | Good Practice Recommendations |
|-----|-------------------|---|
| 1 | FS15 | Ensure that recruitment references taken up are the most relevant |
| 2 | FS30 | Foster panel to produce an annual report to fulfil their quality assurance function |
| 3 | FS19 | Clarify the 'backfill' arrangements for staff completing the PQCCA |
| 4 | FS6 | Continue to develop education monitoring systems |
| 5 | FS11 | Continue to develop formal consultation systems with children looked after |
| 6 | FS29 | Consider whether additional information can be added to carer payment advices to clarify which payments have been made |
| 7 | FS20 | Review the policy guidance and amend errors |
| 8 | FS22 | Audit Foster Carer Agreements to ensure that the correct terms of approval are recorded |
| 9 | FS25FS22 | Amend the complaints policy to include details of how a complaint against a registered person and other senior managers will be resolved, nominate a complaints person and ensure that a comprehensive record of action taken is recorded and a copy placed on relevant staff files |
| 10 | FS25 | Confirm that archived records stored in the roof space are adequately protected from fire |
| 11 | FS9 | Any generic safe care policies should be personalised and sufficiently detailed |

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