

Five Rivers Fostering Service London and East

Five Rivers Child Care Limited

Bates Business Centre, Church Road, Harold Wood, Romford, Essex RM3 0JA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Five Rivers Child Care Limited is a national independent fostering agency that operates a number of fostering services in England. This independent fostering agency is a social enterprise, and therefore it does not have shareholders but invests any profits in its own services.

The agency undertakes the recruitment, assessment, training and approval of foster carers, and provides ongoing support to foster carers. It provides permanent and non-permanent care to children, and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 59 fostering households, caring for 70 children.

The registered manager left on 16 March 2022. A new manager has been appointed and Ofsted is awaiting their application to register.

Inspection dates: 28 November to 2 December 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 30 April 2018

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 have the opportunity to flourish while living with foster carers, who are nurturing and demonstrate a commitment to their role. This has a positive impact on children's well-being. They are happier, more confident, have increased self-esteem and a sense of belonging. The latter is significant, as some children have experienced multiple placement moves.

Partnership working between the foster carers and staff helps to ensure that each child is suitably matched with foster carers who can meet their needs. Children receive individualised support from the agency's family support workers. This enables children to have someone else to confide in, through befriending and mentoring from suitable role models.

Children are able to live with foster carers who share their culture, religion and/or ethnicity. This enables children to practise their faith and observe their traditions. Positive examples were seen of children celebrating Eid and the agency holds inspiring events for Black History Month. The agency also holds a hair clinic, which helps to educate foster carers to provide specialist hair care to children from different ethnic backgrounds.

Children benefit from good educational support. The organisation has a dedicated team focused on improving children's educational outcomes, which includes additional tuition. Leaders and managers monitor children's progress efficiently. Children's academic and personal achievements are celebrated with gift vouchers. Children have good school attendance and there are examples of children completing their GCSEs, undertaking apprenticeships and having aspirations for university.

Parent and child placements benefit from specialist support, which is overseen by a dedicated supervising social worker. Support includes a monthly playgroup, an online messaging group, reflective support groups and specific training for their foster carers. A parent shared that they had not received any written information about the fostering agency. Parents do not have their own guide, which outlines what they can expect from the agency.

Children experience a wide range of activities organised by the agency. Every school holiday, a group activity is planned; an example of this was the summer seaside trip. The various activities assist with building children's self-worth, resilience, social skills and life skills, for example interview skills training.

Children are highly influential within this agency. This is confirmed by the organisation's Investors in Children award. Children contribute towards staff recruitment, foster carer training, activity planning, organisational guidance and service development. Children have helped to produce guides to help others

understand gender, sexuality and their lived experience of being in care. Children have also produced a visual and auditory representation of life in foster care.

Foster carers make a positive difference in children's lives. A child described being in foster care as having a 'circle of love'. A commissioner praised the 'high-quality placements'. A child's social worker highlighted that the agency puts 'children's needs and wishes first'. A parent praised a foster carer, stating they had 'learned a lot'. The only issue is that some of the records kept by foster carers and staff do not reflect a trauma-informed and meaningful overview of children's experiences.

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

Children benefit from a comprehensive range of interventions, which focus significantly on their safety. Children increase their knowledge of online safety, grooming and healthy relationships. They also contribute to their own safer care plan. Children have the opportunity to earn first aid certificates, which provides them with the skills to respond in an emergency situation.

Creative, enthusiastic, therapeutically trained family workers support children, parents and foster carers. They purposefully discuss issues regarding sexual exploitation, going missing and criminal exploitation with children. An excellent example of this is the county lines workshop that they delivered to children. Their work with parents includes the impact and dangers of domestic violence on children.

Children are able to build positive relationships with the police, which helps children to feel more confident in the protection the police could offer them. Community police officers give talks to children and raise their awareness of gangs and criminal exploitation. This helps children to discard myths they may have relating to the police and helps to improve children's outcomes.

Leaders and managers are solution-focused and they meticulously monitor placement stability and causes for concern. This ensures that issues are promptly and efficiently addressed. A local authority placements officer could not recall the agency ever terminating a placement at short notice, which is something that they and their colleagues greatly appreciate. A commissioner said, 'They work well with us to try and sustain placements and put things in place to assist this.'

This is a learning organisation and the commitment to learning from unplanned endings is commendable. The organisation has made a significant commitment to therapeutic practice. A clinical psychotherapist helps with providing a psychological understanding of what might be happening for children. Foster carers and support staff benefit from accredited training. The agency has developed models of developmental attachment and trauma-informed work with children.

Clinical oversight, focused support work and research-informed guidance and practice help to keep children safe. Children have also produced a powerful piece of work called 'the masks we wear' to help foster carers understand the behaviours

expressed by care experienced children. There are currently no children who go missing from care. No children are involved in sexually or criminally exploitative relationships.

The agency was managed effectively throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Children were engaged creatively and virtually, and they also participated in outdoor activities. Leaders and managers report seeing more children during this time and there being a greater level of stability. Foster carers and staff confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic was managed well.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This agency has made a very positive journey, despite the absence of a registered manager. During this time, the highly experienced and dynamic operational manager has been leading the service. A significant amount of effort has been taken to recruit a suitable manager. The acting service manager is the former team manager, and they have worked at the agency throughout their social work career. This individual is well respected and they demonstrate the necessary skills for the role.

Leaders and managers know all the children and foster carers. They lead with ambition and tenacity and focus on providing a quality service for children. Effective monitoring systems individually track each child's progress and their identified needs, which helps with establishing their long-term plan.

Leaders and managers have satisfactorily actioned the recommendations from the last inspection. The service is continually developing. A needs-led approach is taken to develop a responsive service for children. The agency uses its own research to inform the service and action planning. An advanced practitioner role has been introduced to further improve quality and practice.

The fostering panel has a good command of its task, demonstrating a purposeful commitment to children's best interests. Central list members have a range of expertise, which includes social work, health, education, law, and personal experience of being in care and fostering. The fostering panel constructively provides suitable challenge and constructive criticism. The agency decision-maker also provides a further level of scrutiny and oversight, which ultimately safeguards children.

Children are cared for by an agency that is well resourced and fully staffed. Children leaving care have access to a grant and a gift basket to help them with their transition to adult life. Foster carers and staff benefit from competitive salaries. Care is taken to address the well-being of staff and their professional and personal needs. A member of staff said, 'Management really care about us.'

Foster carers have access to a wide range of training. There is a good foster carer recruitment strategy in place. Foster carers are being recruited successfully through word of mouth referrals. New foster carers highlight the positive experience they have during their initial enquiries with the agency.

Staff and foster carers feel well supported and there is good administrative support. Staff have the opportunity to reflect on their work in clinical supervision. Support for foster carers is provided through supervisory social worker visits, newsletters and specific groups. Although carers who live further away have access to informal support groups, these arrangements have not been formalised. This means that some foster carers may not be able to regularly attend these highly valued support groups.

Leaders and managers monitor the necessary regulatory information. However, the compliments and questionnaires they collate do not feature in their quality of care reports. This is a missed opportunity to showcase the agency's positive feedback. Leaders and managers are aware of the agency's strengths and the areas for further development. There is good capacity to further improve.

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 registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (3))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that children’s and foster carers’ views are reflected in the quality of care reports.</p>	<p>1 January 2023</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service’s policy for the keeping and retention of files. In particular, recording about children should be meaningful, trauma-informed and provide a good overview of children’s experiences. (‘Fostering services: National minimum standards’, 26.2)
- The registered person should ensure that peer support is encouraged and supported. In particular, they should formalise support arrangements for those foster carers living further away from the office. (‘Fostering services: National minimum standards’, 21.4)
- The registered person should ensure that when arrangements are made by the local authority for a parent and child to live together with foster carers, for example to enable a parenting assessment to be undertaken, the responsible authority must take particular care to clarify the nature of the arrangement. In particular, the parent should have access to their own guide which summarises the arrangement and their rights and expectations. (‘The Children’s Act 1989 Guidance and regulations volume 4: Fostering Services’, page 13, paragraph 2.14)

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: SC036616

Registered provider: Five Rivers Child Care Limited

Registered provider address: 47 Bedwin Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3UT

Responsible individual: Martin Leitch

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Sharon Payne, Social Care Inspector

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