

# Quality Foster Care

Five Rivers Child Care Limited

1st Floor, Communication House, 134 to 146 High Road, Benfleet, Essex SS7 5LD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Quality Foster Care is a small independent fostering agency that focuses on recruiting and supporting foster carers who live locally to the office. The agency is owned by a larger parent company which operates several fostering services nationally. There are 19 approved households offering emergency, short-term, long-term and parent and child placements for children of all ages. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 28 children in placement and four young people in 'staying put' placements. The previous registered manager left the agency in May 2022.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 6 to 10 February 2023

**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:** 18 February 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

This is a good fostering agency. There are some shortfalls in management oversight but there are also elements of exceptional support for children and foster carers.

The children are carefully matched with their fostering family. As a result, they are flourishing in homes where they feel safe, nurtured and loved. When children do not share a first language, cultural or religious backgrounds with their carers, careful thought is given to how the child's holistic needs will be met. Foster carers are sensitive to difference. They actively seek out local support systems to ensure that children retain a keen sense of positive identity.

Whenever possible, children and their foster families meet each other before they begin to live together and there is a gradual and well-planned process of introductions, including video calls and several visits. This aims to reduce trauma and anxiety for the children and helps them to settle with their foster family. As a result, most children are thriving in families with whom they have lived for some years. Many young people choose to live with their foster families into adulthood under 'staying put' arrangements.

The agency staff and carers work cohesively in a trauma-informed way, ensuring an effective 'team around the child' approach. Many foster carers have received therapeutic fostering training at level 2 or 3. As a result, many foster carers are operating at an enhanced level. One professional said, 'The agency has the best group of foster carers that I have ever had the opportunity to work with. They are open, responsive and reflective.'

The children are well supported to be safe and healthy and to pursue their goals and aspirations. The agency promotes children's positive mental health and well-being through high levels of effective bespoke emotional therapeutic support. One carer said, 'The agency has been so good. Without the staff, I would not be here, and I am not sure that she (the child) would be either.'

Children are fully embedded members of the fostering family. Foster carers ensure that children have positive memories of their time living with the family. Children are encouraged to pursue their interests and talents. They enjoy activities such as football, swimming, arts and crafts and playing board games with their foster families. Children told the inspector how much they have enjoyed experiences of family holidays, Christmas and birthdays because the foster carers make them special occasions. One child said, 'I love it. They (the foster carers) are amazing!' Another child said that living with their foster carers is the best thing ever because they (the foster carers) are 'everything'.

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

The agency provides good preparatory and ongoing training to ensure that foster carers understand that keeping children safe is at the core of everything they do. Consequently, foster carers know what to do should a child make a disclosure, go missing from home or become a potential victim of exploitation.

Agency staff and foster carers understand children's individual risks and work effectively to help keep children safe. The foster carer support groups and informal peer support arrangements mean that foster carers receive support from other foster carers who have real lived experience of caring for children in risky situations.

Significant events are rare. However, foster carers receive effective and responsive support from the agency at any time that they need help and guidance. Agency staff appropriately share any information of concern to help partner professionals better understand emerging risks for children.

Agency staff liaise effectively with partner services to source specialist support for children who have experienced trauma or are at risk of self-harm or exploitation. The agency has funded short-term bespoke therapeutic intervention for individual children to promote their resilience and sense of self-worth.

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

Since the last inspection, the agency has gone through some significant changes. The registered manager left in May 2022. Since that time, three people have acted as interim manager. The agency has communicated clearly with foster carers and staff about the changing management arrangements. However, foster carers and the people working for the agency have missed the familiarity of management stability and there has been some slippage in oversight of some core fostering activity.

On a small number of occasions, foster carers' annual reviews have not taken place within a year of their previous review, as required. The interim manager is reviewing the process for foster carers' reviews to ensure that, in future, all foster carers have a timely review of their ongoing suitability to foster.

The panel shows professional exploration and curiosity to ensure that only suitable prospective foster carers are recommended for approval. The agency makes effective use of the panel for advice and guidance. The return of concerns about standards of care to the panel promotes a fair and transparent review of difficult situations and provides opportunities for discussing lessons learned. However, one of the recent panels did not have the required members from the agency's central list of panel members. This means that this panel was not quorate and conducted in accordance with the regulations.

Recruitment processes for people who work for the agency meet regulatory requirements. However, on occasion, there is a lack of professional curiosity. Consequently, opportunities to further explore suitability are missed. The agency does not take up a reference check with work placements with children or the university for newly qualified social workers. Agency staff check the ongoing validity of social work qualifications for qualified social workers when employed as agency social workers but do not do this for panel members.

The agency's statement of purpose and children's guides contain out-of-date information about the fostering service. This means that children, foster carers, commissioners and other interested parties are not provided with accurate and current information about the fostering service.

The agency provides good training for foster carers and a strong support offer for foster children and birth children. Foster carers benefit from regular targeted therapeutic support groups and individual therapeutic consultations for children and foster carers. The carers value their agency social worker and find the agency support consistently responsive and effective. The agency staff work well in partnership with outside agencies. One professional said, 'It is one of the best agencies that I have ever worked with.'

The acquisition of the agency by a larger and experienced provider is being sensitively managed to ensure that the agency retains its core identity. The children, foster carers and staff now have access to a much wider pool of established systems and resources because of the acquisition. Senior managers have a clear sense of direction and plans to drive improvement in the agency.

Although there has been some slippage in monitoring and oversight, the ethos and culture of the agency are modelled and retained by a committed and effective staff team. As a result, children and foster carers continue to receive the high levels of support that they have come to expect from the agency. The staff and foster carers ensure that the child is always kept at the centre of decision-making.

## 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 provider must appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency. (Regulation 6 (1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that an application for registration of a suitably qualified and experienced manager is submitted to Ofsted.</p>	10 May 2023
<p>No business may be conducted by a fostering panel unless at least the following meet as the panel—</p> <p>either the person appointed to chair the panel or one of the vice chairs,</p> <p>one member who is a social worker who has at least three years' relevant post qualifying experience, and</p> <p>three, or in the case of a fostering panel established under regulation 23 (5), four other members, and</p> <p>where the chair is not present and the vice chair who is present is not independent of the fostering service provider, at least one of the other panel members must be independent of the fostering service provider.</p> <p>(Regulation 24 (1)(i)(ii)(iii))</p>	10 March 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 28 (1) (2))</p>	10 May 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide,</p>	31 March 2023

notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days, and

if the children's guide is revised, supply a copy to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child's age and understanding). (Regulation 4 (a)(b)(c))

## **Recommendation**

- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good practice in staff and panel member recruitment. This includes carrying out all relevant suitability checks and ensuring that references are obtained for roles where people have recently worked with children. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff should be trained in, understand and operate these good practices. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 19.2)

## **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:** SC048508

**Registered provider:** Five Rivers Childcare Limited

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

**Responsible individual:** Martin Leitch

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

**Telephone number:** 01268 795597

**Email address:** admin@qualityfostercare.com

## **Inspector**

Joanna Heller, Social Care Inspector

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