

Five Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Mr James Harmon
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Setting address Miramar, De la Warr Parade, BEXHILL-ON-SEA, East Sussex, TN40 1NR

Telephone number 01424211122
Email office@5fostering.co.uk
Registered person Five Fostering Ltd
Registered manager Mr Robert Edworthy
Responsible individual Mrs Catherine Edworthy
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Five Fostering Limited is a privately owned fostering agency based in Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex. The service was first registered in July 2013 and had its first inspection in June 2014. There are four fostering households registered with three active placements. The agency aims to provide short term, long term, permanent, respite, emergency and, parent and child foster placements.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The management is very passionate about providing the best service to young people and their foster carers. The agency has successfully undertaken the task of improving its overall effectiveness since the last inspection. The majority of the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection have been met specifically those relating to safeguarding children and young people which heavily influenced the previous judgment. Some administrative issues need to be corrected to improve the overall quality of the service. Supervision arrangements for the leadership and management need to be established, documentation for children and young people needs to be signed and dated and risk assessments need to be simplified.

The safeguarding of children and young people now includes an extensive recruitment process. This ensures that anyone employed by the agency is suitable to work with them. In addition, after consultation with the local police, a new safeguarding policy was implemented. It offers consistent advice and guidance, in all instances, to foster carers,

most notably if children and young people go missing from their placement.

There have been clear changes undertaken by the agency to ensure that the administrative shortfalls previously identified were corrected. There are no longer delays in communicating decisions made by the fostering panel to foster carers. Information is shared with Ofsted consistently. The supervision for all staff is now structured with a clear understanding of accountability and all foster carers have successfully attained the Training Support and Development Standard.

The placements for children and young people are safe and stable providing the opportunity to develop positive relationships with their foster carers. The foster carers are committed to them and incorporate them into their wider family thus allowing them to settle quickly. A small number of highly skilled foster carers have been recruited to meet the needs of children and young people with the support of the agency.

Children and young people benefit from the hands-on approach applied by the staff. They speak highly of the staff and how they have contributed to their lives. They have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibility of the agency and all matters relating to their individual care.

Areas of improvement

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 (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

The provider must:

Requirement	Due date
ensure all persons employed receive appropriate supervision; in particular that the manager and responsible individual are professionally supervised. (Regulation 21(4)(a))	28/02/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of

the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment (NMS 4.5)
- ensure a written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person (NMS 24.5)
- ensure information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. (NMS 26.1)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people appreciate being able to share their views which are included in their overall care planning. They understand how long they will be in their placements and what is expected of them. The children and young people feel safe and were observed to be at ease in the presence of their foster carers. They have developed positive attachments and sense of belonging that has allowed them to settle quickly.

Children and young people are confident that their wishes and feelings will be taken seriously. They understand their rights and know how to complain in part to being supplied an easy to read children's guide. A young person said the children's guide was provided upon arrival and has useful information. A foster carer shared a funny story that involved the young person pulling out the children's guide when naughty while saying, 'I know my rights'.

Children and young people develop confidence that helps them overcome complex issues and allows them to make positive progress. They learn to take responsibility for concerning historical behaviours with the assistance of their foster carers. A young person said, 'My foster carer helped me to understand the power of saying sorry, something I previously struggled with.'

The children and young people continue to have good health due to the priority their health needs are given. Despite considerable delays by the local authority in arranging looked after medical assessments. Quality engagement with health professionals by foster carers ensures that any deficiency in paperwork does not prevent the children and young people from accessing routine medical care. A young person has developed a new love of vegetables based upon his foster carer introducing a healthy lifestyle. The young person said, 'I never ate vegetables, and ate a lot of sweets, but now I like veggies and eat less sweets.'

All the children and young people are in mainstream or alternative educational provisions. They are making good progress, such as having good attendance after being out of education for a significant amount of time. Some are developing improved peer relations after suffering from bullying previously in school. A young person said, 'I love my new school; it's like a fresh start'.

Children and young people are included in the wider family of fosters carers which enhances their experience. They feel welcomed and supported into the family. They develop stimulating friendships with the children of the foster carers whilst experiencing their first holiday abroad while in placement. All the children and young people, when spoken too, were able to discuss their recent trips abroad to places such as Spain and France.

The children and young people benefit from the positive, supportive relationships

between foster carers and their parents. These relationships only exist when appropriate and are in their best interest. Knowing that their placements are supported by their significant others has allowed the children and young people to experience successful contact arrangements. A young person said, 'I have regular contact with my family members at my placement and everyone gets along.'

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Requires Improvement**

There are four placements on register and one is now considered inactive. A decision was made to inactivate the placement shortly, after approval. The assessment process failed to explore the relationship between joint applicants who separated shortly after being approved and the agency decision maker did not effectively challenge the decision made by the panel despite reservations. The agency decision maker should be able to make informed decisions on behalf of the agency without self-doubt. Management has recognised that panel was not being overly critical of applicants and have addressed this issue through training and self-evaluation.

All the placements for the children and young people are currently stable due to the recruitment of some committed and skilled foster carers. They are parents with children of their own, and have experience working with children and young people in different situations. The children and young people benefit emotionally from the patience and understanding shown by their foster carers.

Foster carers speak highly of the training provided by the agency and believe they are supplied with the tools to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. They have consistent training opportunities available and can identify particular areas of interest. All foster carers have met the Training, Support and Development Standard. Their reviews are undertaken annually to ensure they continue to care for children and young people at a high level. They demonstrate that they understand their roles and responsibilities.

The foster carers actively contribute to the care of children and young people by being involved in their day-to-day planning. They ensure that care plans reflect the views of the children and young people. They engage with the placing and lead social worker by communicating and updating them in the form of daily logs.

Despite the earlier mentioned concern, the panel continues to be a strength of the agency. The members are experienced and have diverse, relevant expertise that contributes to the approval of potential carers. The varying perspectives assist in the approval of suitable foster carers. Potential foster carers have been disqualified from the assessment process when concerning information becomes available. The agency is now placing quality over quantity in its recruitment process.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

There has been considerable improvements in the policy and procedures to ensure the protection of children and young people. The serious shortfalls identified at the last inspection have been addressed. There is now in place an extensive procedure for the recruitment and selection of new staff and a policy has been implemented to address the risks and impact of children and young people that go missing from their foster placements.

Improvements have been made over how the agency recruits new staff. Members of the management recently completed safe recruitment training. All employment history is verified and all references are confirmed, written and verbally, in accordance with safer recruitment practices. All employees of the service had to re-apply for their position under the new policy. Children and young people benefit from this process and its contribution to a safe environment.

The safeguarding policy has been developed in consultation with the local authority designated officer and the Missing Person Coordinator for the local police. It offers consistent advice and guidance to the entire organisation when dealing with child protection matters for children and young people specifically missing from care. A professional said that the missing from care policies are fantastic and another professional said, 'the policies are clear, relevant and comprehensive.'

Professionals speak highly of the agency's ability to safeguard children and young people. The effective relationships that have been established with professionals has raised the knowledge of safeguarding for the entire service. The police have recently provided training on missing from care and will be providing additional training on child sexual exploitation in the New Year.

The foster carers have good knowledge of the risks associated with the children and young people. They have a clear understanding of behaviours and triggers for the children and young people. They regularly receive training to improve their practice and their ability to protect them. The safety of young people is at the centre of the agency ethos. When spoken to foster carers were able to evidence their knowledge of safeguarding in different scenarios.

The current risk assessments for children and young people contain too much detail. This makes them difficult to understand and confusing for foster carers. Foster carers evidenced they understand the risks associated with the children and young people but said that the assessments need to be simplified for quick

reference when needed. A foster carer highlighted that she only understood the risk assessment after having it explained over and over by management'.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The management has worked extremely hard to develop and maintain a positive working relationship with the local authorities that utilise the service. The service lives up to the expectations for all the children and young people. The management continues to challenge placing authorities when there is a need, for example to obtain documentation. The children and young people benefit from their continuous efforts in these instances.

The registered manager and responsible individual are experienced foster carers with a strong understanding of the foster carers roles and responsibilities. They go to great lengths to support each placement and make themselves available during and after hours. Each member of the staff bring a specialty to the service that contributes to the agency functioning. A foster carer said, 'The management are always there to provide support or just to listen when you're frustrated and need a moan.'

The agency is currently in a good position financially and provides ample resources for the children and young people. Management undertakes the monitoring of the service extensively and reports to Ofsted in a timely manner. A small number of stable placements now exist allowing for effective monitoring of children and young people's progress.

The quality assurance committee assist in the monitoring the progress of the children and young people and the performance of the overall service. This type of monitoring is effective in providing detailed information to management that contributes toward the development of the service. In addition to the quality assurance committee, the agency has retained the services of a consults to keep up to date with legislation and practice.

The management has established and maintains effective relationships with professionals in the police, and placing authorities. The management challenges the local authority on behalf of the children and young people when their placements are not being supported properly. A children's guardian spoke highly of the agency's staff and the exceptional ability they displayed when seeking services for a young person. The guardian said, 'the staff provided me the best example of working together I ever experienced despite the local authority'.

All information relating to the service is clear and outlined in the statement of purpose and the children's guide. There are services identified that have yet to be established within the service due to the slow pace in which foster carers are recruited: for example, parent and child placements have yet to be established.

The staff at the service are dedicated and appropriately qualified for their respective positions. They undertake training at regular intervals to enhance their professional development. The arrangements for supervision have been clarified and are in line with the hierarchy of the agency except for the responsible individual and the registered manager. They do not have arrangements for formal supervision of their work and practice, this was mentioned at the last inspection and still has not been addressed resulting in a requirement being made.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.