

F5 Foster Care Limited

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First Floor Amington House, 95 Amington Road, Birmingham B25 8EP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

F5 Foster Care is a private limited company based in Birmingham. The fostering agency offers long-term, short-term and respite placements. At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency was providing placements for three children and has five fostering households.

The fostering agency has been without a registered manager since 26 February 2021. A new manager joined the agency on 4 May 2021.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this agency on 13 and 14 October 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 10 to 13 May 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 29 July 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: Inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

Following the last full inspection in July 2019, Ofsted issued three compliance notices. At a monitoring visit on 8 October 2019, these were considered to have been met. The fostering agency was then subject to a further monitoring visit on 21 July 2020 to enable Ofsted to review the agency's progress. This visit found that initial progress had not been sustained. Ofsted carried out an assurance visit to the fostering agency on 13 and 14 October 2020. This did not identify any serious or widespread concerns.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The fostering agency provides care for three children. One child has lived with their foster carer for over two years. Two children have been placed with foster carers in the last two weeks.

Managers have made improvements to the agency's matching process. The two children who have recently moved in with their foster carers have experienced a well-planned move and their foster carers have received all the necessary information to enable them to welcome and settle the children into their homes.

The child who has lived with her foster carer for some time feels she is a full member of her foster carer's family. She enjoys a trusted relationship with her foster carer and continues to make good progress.

However, there remains a lack of appropriate management challenge when local authorities have been slow to take the required action. For example, there has been a delay in a local authority arranging for a child to have a passport or a bank account. This delay means that the child is unable to have her own money put into her own bank account.

Foster carers do not receive training or support to enable them to prepare children for adulthood. This leaves foster carers ill-prepared in helping children to prepare for adult life, living independently and reaching their full potential.

The agency does not actively seek the views of children about their care. This means that any plans to develop the service fails to include the child's voice. This is a missed opportunity to enable children to represent their views and wishes.

Foster carers feel well supported by the agency. Staff are approachable and this gives foster carers the confidence they need to carry out their caring role. Support to foster carers includes regular supervision from qualified social workers. However, some of the records of these meetings are cut and pasted from previous meetings. This practice demonstrates a lack of professional curiosity and accountability by social workers.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Foster carers ensure that safe care plans and risk assessments are in place and reflect children's individual needs. As a result, incidents are extremely rare.

Foster carers receive training that enables them to keep children safe. This includes receiving training to help foster carers to have an increased awareness of child sexual exploitation, county lines and radicalisation. However, when it was identified that a child would benefit from specialist support, managers failed to secure this help. This omission does not promote the child's safety and welfare.

Managers are not clear about the fostering agency's approach to behaviour management. As a result, the guidance provided to foster carers does not support good practice.

Safe recruitment of permanent staff is good. However, this does not extend to members of staff who have a contract to work with the agency. This leaves a gap in the agency's safe recruitment procedures.

When managers have identified a serious safeguarding concern during the assessment of a prospective foster carer, the correct procedures have been followed. This ensures that the right safeguarding professionals are involved.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Management of the fostering agency remains inconsistent. The agency has had five managers since being registered. This inconsistency has led to ongoing failures in the management systems that support how the fostering agency fulfils its key functions.

The impact of this inconsistent management is compounded by the responsible individual's limited knowledge and experience in fostering services. This was identified as a weakness at the assurance visit in October 2020 and resulted in a requirement being raised. The progress in meeting this requirement has been poor. The responsible individual has still not completed any training to help them to develop their knowledge of fostering services. As a result, Ofsted has now issued a compliance notice to ensure that action is taken to improve the managerial oversight of the service.

Managers have failed to improve the arrangements for the panel. For example, there have been occasions when an assessment of suitability to foster has needed to be deferred by the panel. This action has been necessary because insufficient information has been provided to enable the panel to reach an informed recommendation. Managers have failed to follow the correct procedure when ceasing an assessment of applicants at stage two of the process. The agency is also not ensuring that assessments are presented to panel within eight months of the application being received. This results in a delay for prospective foster carers

receiving a decision. Furthermore, members of the panel are overdue an annual appraisal of their performance. The lack of urgency to improve panel arrangements demonstrates a lack of management oversight of the agency.

The arrangements for staff supervision are inconsistent. The previous registered manager did not receive supervision for seven months. In addition, when independent social workers have been asked to provide regular support to foster carers, these members of staff have not received regular supervision. This is a missed opportunity to enable staff to reflect on their practice.

Managers do not demonstrate good employment practice. When staff move to new roles, there is an absence of interviews or changes to contracts to reflect a change in role. As a result, it is not clear how staff meet the requirements of their changing roles.

There has been one complaint received by the agency since the assurance visit. Managers were unable to provide the inspectors with any information or records about this matter. As a result, managers do not know if the matter has been concluded. This demonstrates a failure to have an openness to reflect on and to learn from comments and complaints raised about the agency and/or practice.

A new manager joined the agency the week before the inspection. She is an experienced registered manager. She is realistic about the significant improvements that are required in the agency and has started to establish development plans to address the shortfalls.

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 and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, the numbers and the needs of the children placed by the agency, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill.</p> <p>(Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>This particularly refers to managers ensuring that the fostering agency’s panel processes adhere to current guidance regarding the two stages of assessment.</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that the fostering agency only refers a matter to fostering panel when it is satisfied that there is sufficient, good-quality information to enable the panel to make a recommendation.</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that when practice of a child’s local authority does not meet expected standards, that this is appropriately challenged in the child’s best interests.</p>	<p>12 September 2021</p>
<p>*The registered provider must ensure that—</p> <p>where the registered provider is an individual, that person,</p> <p>where registered provider is an organisation, the responsible individual,</p> <p>where the registered provider is a partnership, one of the partners, undertakes, from time to time, such training as is appropriate to ensure that they have the experience and skills necessary for carrying on the fostering agency.</p> <p>(Regulation 8 (2)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>This particularly refers to the responsible individual undertaking training and development to improve their</p>	<p>12 September 2021</p>

<p>knowledge and understanding of the regulations and guidance that inform the delivery of a fostering service.</p>	
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times.</p> <p>(Regulation 11 (1)(a))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that the fostering agency has in place systems to consult with children.</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that the fostering agency has in place training and support for foster carers who are preparing children for adulthood.</p> <p>This particularly refers to managers ensuring that, where it is identified that external support is required for a child, this is implemented and any delay is escalated.</p>	<p>12 September 2021</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>(Regulation 13 (1))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that the fostering agency has a clear behaviour management policy in place that details the approach used, and is supported by appropriate training for staff and foster carers.</p>	<p>12 September 2021</p>
<p>The registered person must ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation.</p> <p>(Regulation 18 (4))</p> <p>This particularly refers to managers documenting complaints received by the fostering agency.</p>	<p>12 September 2021</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must not—</p> <p>employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or</p> <p>allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service.</p>	<p>12 September 2021</p>

<p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is of integrity and good character, has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform, is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. <p>(Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that all staff are safely recruited, including those who work for the agency on a temporary or sessional basis.</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that where an individual is appointed to a new role within the fostering service, the appointment is subject to the due diligence expected of a new appointment.</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal, and are enabled from time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform <p>(Regulation 21 (4)(a)(b))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that all staff receive supervision in line with the foster agency's policy.</p>	<p>12 September 2021</p>

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the fostering panel makes its recommendation on the suitability of a prospective foster carer within eight months of receipt of the prospective foster carer's application to be assessed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 30, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person should ensure that records of foster carer's supervision meetings are unique records of the meeting. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 43, paragraph 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, is reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services', page 41, paragraph 5.15)

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: 1277076

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