

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

A private company operates this fostering agency. The agency was registered with Ofsted in 2018. The manager registered with Ofsted in 2021.

The fostering service provides short-term, long-term, emergency and parent and child foster homes. It also provides foster families who support brothers and sisters to remain together.

At the time of inspection, the fostering service had 5 approved fostering households and 8 children placed with its foster carers.

Due to COVID-19, 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 setting on 14 September 2021 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 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 **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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

Date of last inspection: 10 May 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good.

Enforcement action since last inspection:

Ofsted conducted a full inspection of this independent fostering agency in May 2021. As a result of the inspection, the fostering agency was judged requires improvement to be good. The inspection found shortfalls in the leadership and management of the fostering agency, and this element of the service was judged to be inadequate. Ofsted issued a compliance notice under regulation 8.

Ofsted conducted a monitoring visit on 14 September 2021 to review the action that the provider had taken to meet the compliance notice. In addition, the inspectors reviewed action taken by the provider to meet the requirements and recommendations raised at the full inspection.

Inspectors found that the provider had made improvements in the leadership and management arrangements of the service. The compliance notice had been met, along with the seven requirements and three recommendations. One additional recommendation was raised regarding a risk assessment not being updated.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The fostering service provides a good quality of care, and the experiences and outcomes for children are very positive. Children, many of whom have complex needs, receive personalised care that meets their needs, and they are kept safe.

Children thrive in secure homes, enjoying relationships with their foster carers that are loving and nurturing. A child said of their foster carers, 'Moving to their home is the best thing that has ever happened to me.'

The agency pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity, and children's heritage and culture are taken into consideration during matching. Children receive support from their foster carers to maintain and develop their identity. Because of this, children's self-esteem and confidence improves.

Children confirmed that they feel listened to. They are aware of how to make a complaint, but have not raised any complaints since the last inspection. Children are able to influence the development of the agency through regular consultation. The agency's social workers ensure that children have a voice within the fostering service. This helps to shape the services provided for children.

When new children move into their foster family, they are warmly welcomed. Planning and matching arrangements are effective in identifying suitable foster carers to care for children. Children arrive at their foster family home in a planned and sensitive way, with information shared and introductions undertaken beforehand when possible. This helps children to settle quickly with their new families.

Children's learning outcomes are good. They make good academic and vocational progress. Educational attendance is good and children make steady progress from their starting points.

Children live healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that they promote children's physical, emotional and social well-being. Children enjoy engaging in activities and local sport groups and are supported to swim and ride bicycles independently. Children informed the inspector that they enjoy spending time with their friends and attending friends' birthday parties. Children have good access to primary healthcare services and receive advice and support from specialist services when this is needed. This is particularly the case for children who have complex health needs.

Foster carers say that joining the agency is a pleasant and thorough experience. One foster carer stated, 'My experience was welcoming, informative and interesting.' The annual review process to assess the continued suitability of foster carers is equally as robust. Foster carers say that their needs are sensitively considered and reviewed by the assessor and the fostering panel. This supportive approach means that foster carers are well equipped and motivated to provide good care for children.

A local authority social worker informed the inspector that since being with their foster carers from this agency, '[The child] has received a stable level of care, allowing them to work through a lot of their early experiences. They can now complete life story work with cognitive space to make sense of this.'

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

Foster carers and staff work hard to protect children from harm and abuse. They ensure that the safety and well-being of children are paramount. Children say they feel safe and well cared for.

Children benefit from a well-run fostering service that has robust child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. Foster carers and staff implement these procedures well and follow guidance as needed. Children have good opportunities to chat in private with people who support them, and the agency's consultation with children is regular. The agency's social workers routinely complete unannounced visits to foster carers' homes. One additional unannounced visit is completed by another social worker during the year for further assurances. This provides for additional scrutiny that promotes children's safety.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers is focused well on child protection. This supports their safe care of children. There are very few instances of children going missing from care, substance misuse, involvement in child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation.

Foster carers are effectively prepared by the agency to support children in managing their behaviour. There have been no incidents of physical restraint, and the use of consequences is rare.

Foster carers and staff receive and attend relevant training. A catalogue of training is provided that enables foster carers to develop the required level of knowledge and skill to safeguard children.

Risk assessments and children's individual safer care plans outline how fostering households will keep children safe. These are regularly updated. This helps to inform foster carers about action to take when risks are posed. These strategies are effective and include, for example, how to prevent risk of self-harm and what to do if children going missing from care.

Managers and the fostering agency administrator ensure the safe vetting and recruitment of staff and panel members.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership of the fostering service is outstanding. The agency is achieving the aims and objectives set out with the statement of purpose. The manager shows an ambitious vision for the agency, and has high expectations of the standard of care to

be provided for the children. This vision permeates the team and is shared throughout the agency.

Leaders and managers strive for continual development and improvement of the service. The registered manager is qualified and very experienced. She receives support from senior managers and directors within the agency, who are equally committed and invested in achieving ambitious progress and positive experiences for children.

Highly visible managers take a keen interest in obtaining the views of stakeholders and foster carers in order to further improve the outcomes for children. One foster carer informed the inspector, 'My views are always taken into consideration. They do everything to accommodate me and work around me. I am never left out, and they even include my family in events, which I think is a really lovely touch.'

The manager has extremely effective monitoring systems. Leaders and managers continually review plans for continual growth and development of the fostering service. For example, both the registered manager and responsible individual prepare monthly monitoring reports about the quality of care. The very regular overview of the service prompts change and innovation.

Leaders consistently make use of research and study materials to inform their decision-making. For example, the agency aims to enhance its existing trauma-informed approach to care. This is to help staff to improve their skill base and knowledge about the impact of children's past trauma and the implications for children's care. Managers and staff explore regularly within team meeting forums children's protection, placement issues and any emerging themes. This helps to ensure that children have safe and positive experiences.

The agency provides foster carers with exceptional training opportunities. The training programme is extensive and of a high quality. Foster carers are provided with additional learning opportunities through the foster carer support groups. One example of this is the agency sourcing a pharmacist to visit carers during one such meeting in order to provide additional safe administration of medication training. These training opportunities equip foster carers with excellent knowledge and skills. This helps them to care for children safely.

The agency is well resourced to meet the needs of the foster carers and children. Foster carers overwhelmingly say that the support they receive from the fostering service is excellent. Staff maintain good communication with foster carers and regularly visit them and children at their homes. A foster carer shared, 'We want to write separately about our supervised social worker. Her very hard work and maximum support make us feel comfortable and secure. She is always with us in every situation. We can count on her always.'

The staff team is equally well trained and supported. Staff receive regular and meaningful supervision, and training opportunities are good. Staff participate regularly in reflective team and peer support group meetings in order to discuss

practice and development. A member of staff said, 'The support I receive is massive. No matter what I want to talk about, [the manager] is approachable. Nothing is too small; nothing is too big.'

Staff complete foster carer assessments comprehensively. The annual review process is thorough. This promotes the regular review of foster carers' suitability to continue to care for children.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively and benefits by having a membership that is drawn from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work presented at panel meetings. The administration of the fostering panel is effective, and panel meeting minutes are sufficiently detailed.

The agency decision-maker (ADM) has extensive experience and is suitably qualified for the role. The ADM provides a clear rationale when approving foster carers. The ADM will question the panel's decision, if required, and offers guidance for further learning. This gives further assurance that foster carers who are recruited have the skills and resilience to care for children and keep them safe. Following annual reviews, foster carers are always informed of the decision of their continuation of approval. The ADM, who is employed solely on a sessional basis, does not get involved in any other aspects of the agency's work and so has little standing or influence on this, which in turn may influence on the ADM's ability to carry out their decision-making. This issue has been raised with senior managers during the previous inspection, but they have yet to take action to address this potential vulnerability in the service.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendation

- The fostering service's decision-maker should be a senior person within the fostering service, or is a trustee or director of the fostering service, who is a social worker with at least 3 years post-qualifying experience in childcare social work and has knowledge of childcare law and practice. In particular, the registered person must ensure that if the ADM is employed on a sessional basis, it is clear how they are engaged in the agency to continue to support the agency's capacity to promote the needs of children fostered by the agency. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 48, paragraph 23.12)

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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Inspector

Kev Brammer, Social Care Inspector

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