

Quality Foster Care

Five Rivers Child Care Limited

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

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Quality Foster Care was registered as an independent fostering agency on 19 January 2004. It is a small agency that is owned by a larger parent company, which operates several national fostering services.

The premises are based in South Benfleet, Essex. The manager was registered with Ofsted on 27 July 2023.

The agency offers a range of placements, including emergency, parent and child, and short- and long-term placements for individual children and sibling groups, including asylum-seeking children.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency had 20 approved fostering households, and 29 children were living with approved foster carers, with an additional three young people in staying put arrangements.

Inspection dates: 23 to 27 June 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 6 February 2023

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, some of whom have very complex needs, are benefiting from good-quality foster care that enables them to thrive and reach their potential. A high proportion of children are placed permanently with their foster carers. These stable arrangements contribute strongly to their sense of belonging and emotional well-being. Over two thirds of the children are placed with their siblings, which helps them to understand their history and identity. This is further supported by the foster carers' commitment to enabling children to stay in touch with birth family members.

Children are happy to be part of their foster carers' family. The foster carers love them, are committed to them and want the best for them. A local authority social worker said, 'The children's futures are bright because they are with carers that see them as part of the family.' Children are supported in education, emotionally and in relation to their health needs. Foster carers are strong advocates for them. One child said, 'I really feel like a loved child', and another said, 'We love our family here, they are the best family ever.'

Children's participation in their care is a strength and fully supported by the wider organisation's commitment to engaging with children. This includes children's representation on the youth council, which meets annually with senior managers. Outcomes from these meetings include the development of resources. Meetings include topics such as bullying as a result of children's care experience, empowering voices for children with complex needs, and a handbook for children of colour. More locally, a recently appointed family support worker is enthusiastically developing her role to support foster carers and children to meet and enjoy group activities. These aspects improve children's self-esteem and help them to feel listened to and empowered.

The organisation's clinical team provides valuable resources to the agency in terms of consultation, training, assessment and reflective practice. These resources are fully embedded. This further supports staff, foster carers and children, particularly in relation to placement stability.

The matching of new children is carefully considered. Foster carers are not under any pressure to take a child whose needs they cannot meet. If placements are at risk of disruption, there are regular network meetings to identify how to support carers and children appropriately. When placements end, there is good analysis of what went wrong, to minimise the risk of further disruption.

The agency benefits from a national recruitment strategy, which is fully supported by local staff. When people are interested in fostering, they receive a warm welcome. The application and assessment processes are well considered and timely.

Foster carers feel well supported by the agency and their social worker. One foster carer said, 'I may not have made it without my supervising social worker.' Foster

carers can speak to senior managers through their carer representatives. They are supported by a peer mentor as well as regular support groups. Carers commented, 'I have nothing but praise for Quality Foster Care, and 'They are like a family, always there for you whenever you call. They have the children's best interests at heart and are always there for them.'

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

The agency has good systems for identifying and responding to risk. Safer care and risk-reduction plans are thorough. These plans provide the necessary guidance for foster carers to understand and manage a variety of risks. In situations of higher risk, meetings led by a therapist from the clinical services team ensure that information is shared, foster carers are supported and professionals share any decision-making.

Foster carers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to respond to safety concerns, such as a child going missing from home. They have access to a responsive out-of-hours service when necessary.

The agency has embraced a therapeutic model of care, which is being rolled out through training. This enables foster carers to respond appropriately to situations of challenge. This model includes invaluable access to a therapist for staff and foster carer consultations.

Any allegations are responded to appropriately through prompt reporting, cooperative multi-agency working and independent support to foster carers. When necessary, standards of care investigations are carried out. During these, foster carers' ongoing suitability to foster is considered in an early review to the fostering panel.

A small number of fostering households have not had an unannounced visit from the social worker within one year. This is an important mechanism for the agency to ensure that children are living in a safe environment, which is not consistently taking place.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency has invested in the service since the last inspection. The agency demonstrates a strong commitment to developing for the benefit of the children. There is now a registered manager. However, the manager has yet to apply for the required management course. The agency benefits from a stable staff team, including a family support worker and access to the clinical services team. A strong passion for achieving the best possible outcomes for children permeates throughout the agency.

Staff are well supported by accessible managers, good communication, regular supervision, annual appraisals and access to good-quality training. Staff caseloads are manageable, and the agency is appropriately staffed. Positive and responsive working relationships with partner agencies ensure consistent support and

communication. Monitoring is systematic and regular. There is good learning from thematic audits, evaluations, complaints and placement endings.

Foster carers benefit from regular supervision. While records are made, there is some inconsistency both in the content and writing style in records. Some of the required records were unavailable on case files. Foster carers and children should receive the same standard of case records, with easily accessible documents.

Foster carer training is relevant and of good quality to enhance foster carers' skills and knowledge base. A foster carer commented, 'QFC provides an excellent level of support and have an extensive and informative selection of training courses available.'

Annual reviews are thorough and carried out by a person who is independent of the foster carers, which adds an additional layer of scrutiny. These are now carried out within timescales and there is a system to monitor these.

The fostering panel consists of a range of panel members with diverse backgrounds and experience. It provides effective and independent oversight of foster carer approvals and their reviews. Although the panel members have been appraised in the last 12 months, there is no evidence to show that the panel chair has had his performance reviewed. This is an essential mechanism to demonstrate his competence for the role. The agency decision-maker makes timely and considered decisions. However, these are not recorded in a way that fully demonstrates the decision-making process.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 10.5)
- The registered person should ensure that appointees to the role of registered manager, who do not have the management qualification, must enrol on a management training course within six months and obtain a relevant management qualification within three years of their appointment. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 17.3)
- The registered person should ensure that staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.2)
- The registered person should ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, should be reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service's decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair and, for this purpose, may attend a proportion of panel meetings but only as an observer. Views about the chair's performance should be sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings, such as prospective foster carers and social workers who present reports to the panel. For all other panel members, the panel chair should conduct the performance review. (The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 4: Fostering services, page 41, paragraph 5.15)
- The registered person should ensure that in reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision-maker should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM* [2009] EWCA 328 (Admin), in which the court set out guidance for the way in which an adoption agency decision-maker should approach a case, whether it is a decision based on the agency panel's recommendation or the independent review panel's recommendation. This applies equally to fostering decision-makers. The court said that it would be good discipline and appropriate for the decision-maker to: list the material taken into account in reaching the decision; identify key arguments, consider whether they agree with the process and approach of the relevant panel and are satisfied as to its fairness and that the panel has properly addressed the arguments; consider whether any additional information now available to them that was not before the panel has an impact on its reasons or recommendation; identify the reasons given for the relevant recommendation that they do or do not wish to adopt; and state (a) the adopted reasons by cross reference or otherwise and (b) any further reasons for their

decision. (The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 4: Fostering services, page 46, paragraph 5.40)

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

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Inspector

Rosemary Chapman, Social Care Inspector

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