

Orange Grove Fostercare Northwest

North West Office, Walnut Tree Business Centre, Suite 3, Northwich Road, Lower Stretton, Warrington WA4 4PG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Orange Grove Fostercare Northwest is an independent fostering agency. It was registered with Ofsted on 24 February 2015 and is based in Lower Stretton, Warrington. The agency is part of Orange Grove Fostercare, an independent fostering provider with six registered offices across the country.

On 8 March 2019, 43 children were placed with the agency and there were 42 approved fostering households.

The agency offers emergency, short-term, long-term, permanent and respite placements. It also can offer specialist placements, including brother and sister, parent and child and solo placements, and placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, teenagers and 'staying put' arrangements.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 March 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 23 October 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Children receive an extremely high quality of care in stable placements, and this improves their lives.
- Children, including those with complex and challenging needs, are making exceptional and sustained progress because of the quality of care and support that they receive from foster carers.
- Foster carers have the warmth, expertise and resilience to provide vulnerable children with safe and nurturing homes. Children enjoy very positive relationships with their foster carers. They are loved, have a strong sense of belonging and feel part of the family.
- The agency and foster carers have high aspirations for every child in their care. They work tirelessly with partner agencies to make sure that children get the best possible support and achieve excellent education and health outcomes.
- Foster carers are extremely well prepared, assessed, trained and supported to provide children with high-quality care and support.
- An exceptionally strong safeguarding culture throughout the organisation protects children from harm. Children feel safe and their concerns are taken seriously. Foster carers have the skills to recognise any signs that could indicate that a child may be at risk of abuse, neglect, radicalisation or sexual and/or criminal exploitation.
- The agency takes decisive action when it has concerns about children's safety. Social workers and foster carers ensure that their concerns are taken seriously, and that appropriate action is taken by safeguarding agencies to protect children.
- Foster carers have the expertise, skills, training and support to understand and help children with complex emotional needs and challenging behaviour.
- The leadership and management of the agency are inspirational, efficient and effective. Their ambitious vision to provide children with an excellent standard of care and to make a difference in children's lives is demonstrated in practice.
- Leaders and managers know well the strengths of the agency and the areas that they need to improve.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Complete a detailed matching assessment, written before the start of a placement, showing the reasons why the foster carer's experience, knowledge and skills make them capable of meeting the child's assessed needs effectively.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the responsible authority has information and support from the fostering service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child's needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement. (National Minimum Standard 15)

In particular, ensure that a detailed, written assessment is made in advance of how the carer's experience, knowledge and skills make them capable of meeting the child's assessed needs effectively.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The agency's excellent professional practice makes sure that children receive high-quality care and support. Children live in warm, nurturing, safe and stimulating homes. They enjoy reliable and trusting relationships with their foster carers. They develop a strong sense of acceptance and belonging. They feel very much part of the family. A child said, 'This feels like a proper family – they feel inside like my own mum and dad. I feel safe, because I can trust them to look after me.'

Children, including those with complex and challenging needs, are making exceptional and sustained progress because of the quality of care that they receive. A social worker said: 'I am extremely impressed with the progress that the child has made. From her starting point of multiple placement breakdowns and placement moves, this child and her sister have been offered stable, consistent care that promotes her emotional health. As a result, she has made sustained progress academically and is closing the gap. Her life chances and opportunities have been significantly enhanced through the care she receives.'

Foster carers have the knowledge, expertise, resilience and personal qualities to provide vulnerable children with stable and high-quality placements. The arrangements for recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective foster carers are thorough and carried out in a timely way. Detailed and analytical assessments clearly show people's suitability to foster. Assessments are informed by a comprehensive understanding of current research and practice. Meticulous management oversight makes sure that assessments are completed to a consistently high standard.

The agency matches children successfully to foster carers who can meet their assessed needs. The agency always makes sure that it obtains from local authorities as much information as possible about a child before making the decision for a child to move to live with a foster carer. Most children are living in stable placements: 62% of children live in permanent placements and 44% of children live with their brothers and/or sisters. Most placements end in a planned way, in line with the local authority's plan for the child, including returning to live with their family, being adopted or moving into independent accommodation or 'staying put' arrangements.

Overall, the matching process is managed very effectively. Decisions are made collectively by foster carers, supervising social workers and the child's social worker. However, children's records do not always include a detailed assessment, written before the start of a placement, showing the reasons why the foster carer's experience, knowledge and skills make them capable of meeting the child's assessed needs effectively.

Children receive an exceptionally high standard of care and support, tailored to meet their personal needs and circumstances. Each child is seen and treated as an

individual. Foster carers recognise the different personalities and needs of brothers and/or sisters and make sure that they are treated as individuals and have the help that they need to make progress and follow their interests. Foster carers show very good insight into the dynamics of brother and sister relationships and how to manage them. For example, foster carers have created an environment and provide emotional support that allows children to be children again, no longer having to act as a carer to their brothers and sisters.

Foster carers show a tremendously strong commitment to the children in their care. They provide children with compassion and reassurance to help them to make sense of their lives and recover from trauma and negative experiences. An education psychologist said: 'Because of the foster carer's understanding of attachment type needs, she can adjust and refine suggested strategies to suit the child and his unique situation. It is my view that the child is provided with the calmness and stability he requires to recover from his previous adverse experiences.'

Foster carers meet the complexities of children's behaviour with warmth, understanding and perseverance. For example, a child with fragile emotional health is becoming increasingly resilient, the longer she lives with her foster carers. She is no longer feeling frightened, having nightmares or wetting the bed. She can now sleep with the doors closed and with the lights off. She is getting a good night's sleep and is fully rested. She has settled at school and is making progress, and is more able to manage her feelings and behaviour.

The agency and foster carers encourage and support children to express their views and to influence the decisions affecting their lives. Foster carers are strong advocates for children and help them to have their say. Supervising social workers and family support workers see children regularly to find out about their placement. This gives children the chance to have a say about what is important to them in their day-to-day lives or if they have any worries. Children, including foster carers' birth children, contribute to foster carers' annual reviews.

The agency finds creative ways for children to share their views and influence the development of the service. Recently, the agency gathered children's views about 'what makes a good foster carer' by asking them to write their views on 'paper leaves' at different events. This has been very popular, with children asking for more leaves to write on. The response has been significantly higher than from the formal surveys that have been used in the past.

The agency has improved its children's and young people's guides to make sure that children have the information that they need in an engaging, informative and age-appropriate way.

Children have access to primary and specialist healthcare services that meet their individual health needs. Healthy routines are quickly established, and foster carers help children to achieve a healthy diet, lifestyle and a good quality of sleep. Foster carers successfully re-engage children with health professionals, such as the dentist, and ensure that any concerns are quickly identified and addressed. Collaborative work with health colleagues has meant that children are able to access the

necessary services with as little disruption to their lives as possible. As a result, children enjoy much-improved health and emotional well-being outcomes.

The agency and foster carers have very high aspirations for the children in their care. They work tirelessly to encourage and improve children's learning and development. Children's school attendance and attainment levels have improved remarkably from their starting points. Foster carers have very good insight into children's learning needs. They support children to reach their full potential, including helping them with homework and making learning fun. For example, a foster carer devised a game to develop children's vocabulary at home, where they think of different words for things to support them.

The agency's national lead for education works with foster carers and supervising social workers to monitor and improve children's outcomes. It is helping them to make sure that children are getting the support that they need at school to make progress. A foster carer was extremely supportive while her child was not in full-time education and used her skills as a former teacher to supplement his formal tuition with additional learning sessions at home. She was instrumental in helping him to settle into a new school, where he is growing in confidence, has made friends and is making very good progress in all his subjects. She supports his academic work at home and provides practical and experiential ways to develop his understanding, for example going out for a walk to find out about nature and building a volcano.

Children have excellent opportunities to build their social skills, their confidence and to develop their talents. Foster carers make sure that children have fun and that they enjoy a wide range of social, educational and leisure activities in the local community. Children regularly take part and achieve in, for example, sports, dance, creative arts, learning a musical instrument, horse riding, cycling, trampolining and cadets. They stay overnight with their friends. Children take part in after-school activities and school trips. They also enjoy regular family holidays, including trips abroad, with their foster carers. A social worker said, 'The foster carer makes sure that the child attends lots of activities and encourages [name] to try lots of new activities to ensure he gains plenty of experiences.'

The agency and foster carers work exceedingly hard to prepare children for adult life. They make sure that children continue to receive the best support possible to maximise their opportunities to succeed when they leave school. Foster carers make every effort to ensure that children have the practical life skills that they need for the future and that they understand their rights and legal entitlements. They help children to build the confidence and resilience for adult life, including making healthy relationships, being aware of risk and managing their own safety, and having a well-established support network.

Foster carers understand how important it is for children to continue relationships with significant people, such as parents, relatives and friends. Foster carers support children to keep in touch with important people in a safe and planned way. Foster carers develop good relationships with birth parents to ensure that children have positive experiences when they see them. They are also aware that seeing their parents can be a difficult time for children, and make sure that children have the

support and understanding that they need.

Children's experiences are enhanced by the quality of support, guidance and training available to their foster carers. This includes excellent support from skilled and knowledgeable supervising social workers; support from other foster carers; group reflection and one-to-one consultation with a clinical psychologist; and targeted and specialist training, such as understanding attachment and trauma, and children's heritage and culture.

Supervising social workers identify quickly when children's placements are fragile. They support the children and the foster carers, reducing the risk of the placement ending in an unplanned way. The agency uses respite placements, family support workers and therapists in a targeted way to deal with challenging situations and to make decisions in the best interests of children. This invaluable support has developed foster carers' understanding of children's needs and how best to support individual children when they are in crisis, to build positive relationships and enable brothers and/or sisters to continue to live together. If it is in the child's best interest to end the placement, the agency makes every effort to ensure that this is done in a planned and supportive way for both the child and the foster carers.

At the end of placements, supervising social workers and therapists spend time with foster carers to reflect on and understand what happened, provide emotional support and identify areas for improvement.

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

A strong safeguarding culture is embedded throughout the agency. Children feel safe and have a strong sense of safety and well-being. They have trusted adults whom they can talk to about any worries. Adults listen to them, take their concerns seriously and take appropriate action to keep them safe.

Managers, supervising social workers and foster carers make sure that children live in safe and supportive homes. Their professional practice and the safeguarding arrangements help to protect children from harm.

Foster carers have an in-depth understanding of the vulnerabilities of the children in their care and any current concerns about children's safety. Foster carers are extremely vigilant and curious. They have the skills to recognise any signs that may indicate that a child may be at risk of abuse, neglect, self-harm, bullying, sexual and/or criminal exploitation and trafficking. The agency makes sure that foster carers receive high-quality safeguarding training and have the information that they need to protect children.

Children have up-to-date individual risk assessments and safety plans. Managers, supervising social workers and foster carers continually assess the risks for each child and take the necessary steps to manage risks safely. Foster carers support children to be aware of risks and to manage their own safety. This has included helping children to take reasonable risks as part of their development, for example

spending time with their friends in the community, having sleepovers and using public transport independently.

Managers, supervising social workers and foster carers act decisively when they have concerns about children's welfare, and always follow the agency's safeguarding procedures. They respond appropriately when children go missing from home. This includes finding out the reasons why children may have gone missing and then taking any necessary steps to reduce the risk of it happening again. The agency makes sure that children have independent return-home interviews and that the information from the interviews is shared to enable foster carers to protect children.

The agency has strong and effective relationships with local authorities, designated officers and the police. Concerns about children's safety are shared immediately with the relevant local authority. The agency is assertive in making sure that concerns about children are taken seriously. When the agency has not been satisfied with the response from the local authority, it has escalated its concerns appropriately.

Investigations into allegations and concerns about foster carers are well coordinated with the local authority and police. They are thorough, handled fairly and quickly and in line with the statutory guidance. Foster carers are offered the support of an independent advocacy service.

The agency makes sure that foster carers have the expertise, skills, training and support to understand and help children with complex and challenging needs. Foster carers are resilient and develop their skills through training and through guidance from a clinical psychologist to manage challenging behaviour constructively. They work positively and confidently with children to find the best way possible to support them. This is based on foster carers building positive and trusting relationships with children in a safe and reliable environment and understanding their behaviour. Foster carers deal appropriately with situations when children feel anxious and unsafe, without the need to restrain children. A social worker said, 'the foster carers meet the needs of these children in a kind and gentle manner. They do this with patience and a great deal of emotional warmth and organisation. From my understanding of the children's past, this is exactly what they need.'

Managers and leaders monitor critical incidents thoroughly, including safeguarding concerns and the management of children's behaviour. They identify patterns and emerging trends and reflect on what has happened to identify learning and to inform future practice. The manager has developed innovative ways of supporting foster carers and enhancing their confidence and skills in caring for children with complex needs and challenging behaviour. Training in attachment and trauma and a psychologically informed model of care is equipping foster carers with the skills and knowledge to understand how best to work with children and to manage and resolve the issues that influence their behaviour.

The agency provides foster carers with an exceptionally good standard of support and scrutiny. Social workers provide foster carers with practice-related supervision at least once a month, as well as undertaking unannounced visits. This makes sure that foster carers are working in the best interests of the children in their care and that

they receive the right support, advice and guidance. This enables them to provide children with a high standard of care and protection.

The agency's extremely careful recruitment and selection of foster carers, panel members and staff help to protect children from unsuitable adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager has the necessary vision, drive, experience and expertise for the role. She is an inspirational, confident, organised, forward-thinking and effective manager. She is dedicated to improving the lives of the children in the agency's care. An ambitious ethos of high expectations and aspirations for every child is demonstrated throughout the agency. It is visible in the professional practice of foster carers, supervising social workers, family support workers, therapists, senior managers and staff. It is equally evident in the consistently high standard of care and support that children receive and the positive experiences and improved outcomes for children.

Leaders and managers have created a warm and friendly working environment for foster carers, social workers and staff to help them to provide children with an excellent standard and consistency of care. Foster carers, supervising social workers and staff are knowledgeable, experienced, skilled and highly motivated. They are passionate and resilient, and do not give up trying to make a positive difference to children's lives. Foster carers' dedication, expertise and professionalism are recognised and valued.

Leaders and managers provide supervising social workers and staff with excellent support, guidance and encouragement. Social workers and staff have regular opportunities through practice-related supervision, team meetings and training to reflect on children's progress and their own performance and to share and develop their skills and knowledge. This includes supporting supervising social workers to achieve higher qualifications.

Leaders and managers have an in-depth understanding of the agency's strengths and key priorities for development. They make sustained improvements that benefit children. Clear and efficient management and monitoring systems at different levels provide leaders and managers with excellent oversight of the agency's activities, performance, quality of care and children's progress.

The manager and supervising social workers have credibility with local authorities and other agencies. They are hard-working, open and transparent, effective communicators, and are always focused on what is in the child's best interests. Their productive working relationships with local authorities mean that they have a detailed understanding of local needs. The agency responds effectively to current and predicted future demands. A targeted recruitment strategy is helping to attract foster carers who can meet the specific and diverse needs of children, including brothers and sisters.

The fostering panel and agency decision-maker make safe, timely, extremely

thorough and careful decisions about people's suitability to foster children. The agency benefits from independent panel members with in-depth knowledge, expertise and vast experience of working with children and foster care. Panel members include people with care experience and from education, health and social work backgrounds, as well as foster carers.

The establishment of a distinct fostering panel for this agency in the North-West has been a notable achievement in improving the effectiveness of the panel. The agency has recruited suitable panel members from the North-West to make sure that there are always enough people available to attend each panel. Another positive consequence of having a North-West panel is that it is easier for foster carers to attend the panel for their reviews. It also allows for the development of better working relationships between panel members and the managers, supervising social workers and staff in the region.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC485778

Registered provider: Orange Grove Fostercare Limited

Registered provider address: Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Milton Keynes
MK17 8LX

Responsible individual: Bridgid McCaig

Registered manager: Heather Sheridan

Telephone number: 01925 730435

Email address: bmccaig@picscare.co.uk

Inspectors

Nick Veysey, social care inspector

Pauline Yates, social care inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019