

Orange Grove Fostercare London and Essex

Orange Grove Fostercare Ltd
5 Willow Grove, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 5BN
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is part of a national organisation that provides fostering services across England.

The agency currently supports 44 fostering households caring for 40 children. Placements are primarily short or long-term and some foster carers provide respite care.

Inspection dates: 28 January to 1 February 2019

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 **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 25 January 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Foster carers provide children with good-quality individualised care and support.
- Children have good experiences of family life, lead healthy lifestyles and do well in education.
- A family support worker provides good-quality additional help to children.
- Children enjoy stable and secure placements. Children are supported to feel part of the fostering family and develop a sense of belonging over time.
- Foster carers demonstrate an understanding of the needs of the children placed with them. They receive good support from a stable staff team and said that they feel very much part of a team.
- Foster carers are sensitive to the reasons why children may struggle with their emotions. They provide children with good levels of nurturing care and many look for creative ways to show children their love, commitment and interest.
- Members of the leadership and management team are strong, passionate about their work, and have a clear understanding of the needs of children.
- Children can express their views and opinions and they influence the day-to-day care that they receive.
- The fostering panel is effective and offers strong scrutiny and advice.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- For the agency to ensure that children have easy access to the complaint's procedures.
- The agency to ensure that there is a good-quality training and development programme for supervising social workers.
- For the agency to ensure evidence-based information that provides enough detail on the progress of individual children. Within this, the child's views should be evidenced.

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

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

- The fostering service must ensure that children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. (National Minimum Standards, 1.6)

In particular, ensure that the children's guide gives easy access to the complaints system.

- Foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. (NMS 20.5)
- Ensure there is a good quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, post-qualifying and in-service training, that staff are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of children, keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the fostering service. (NMS 23.1)
- 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. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (NMS 26.6)

In particular, ensure that records kept evidence the child's voice and contribute to an understanding of the child's life and the progress they have made.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The fostering service provides children with good-quality placements and the progress for children is very positive. Children develop secure attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. Children thrive in their placements and unplanned endings are rare. Children are happy, and develop good levels of self-esteem and self-confidence.

The model of service used in this agency includes both a family support worker and a contracted therapist. This provides robust support to staff, children and foster carers, which sustains placements and encourages best practice. Children's individual needs are addressed well. Supervising social workers have manageable caseloads and know their families thoroughly. Foster carers are of a high calibre and are energetic and imaginative.

Most children make very good progress because foster carers provide high-quality care. Foster carers feel well supported by the agency and are confident and enthusiastic about the difference that they make to children's lives.

Children receive consistent care and support. Foster carers rarely use respite care to support them. They prefer to include children in all aspects of the foster family and rely on family, friends and informal arrangements with other approved foster carers from the agency for support. This reflects an agency and foster carers who place the needs of children at the centre of all that they do.

The service promotes the educational achievement and healthy lifestyles of children. The service is particularly skilled in meeting the complex needs of children. These children receive excellent care that meets their holistic needs, and which addresses issues of 'difference' excellently.

The fostering service also meets children's emotional and mental health needs. Some children receive a regular service from the child and adolescent mental health services. The agency benefits from a consultant therapist who offers clinical support to supervising social workers through advice and support. This is particularly to support foster carers who have behavioural support issues, enabling them to understand the communication needs of children and further promote placement stability and success.

Some children placed with foster carers have complex needs. It is apparent that many foster carers have excellent skills in supporting children with such needs. Foster carers work closely with health professionals to ensure that children receive the support and services that they require. Foster carers in this agency strongly advocate for children. They place the needs of children at the centre of all that they do. A foster carer commented, '(X) is very much part of this family, therefore it is incumbent on us to ensure that he receives all the services that he requires to enable him to communicate with the world around him. Should that mean that we have to fight for his rights, we will do that every step of the way.'

Children engage in a wide range of physical and social activities that are of their choosing. These include sports, youth clubs, and involvement in the arts, music and

dance. Most children enjoy family holidays with their foster families. In addition, children and their families very much enjoy social events and activities organised and funded by the fostering agency.

Staff acknowledge and celebrate all achievements made by children. This acts as a motivation for children to aim high in their ambitions.

Children know the staff in the agency well. This enables children to feel confident that their views, wishes and feelings are listened to and considered important to the foster carers and the agency. The agency is working hard to develop its engagement with children to ensure that they play an active role in the agency. Children are in the process of reviewing the children's guide and, in time, will be involved in the interviewing of prospective foster carers. At present, children's written goals and progress reports do not contain evidence of the child's opinion. This limits their effectiveness.

The agency staff and foster carers help children to maintain access to family members when this is possible and it is safe for them to do so. Foster carers work well with birth parents and manage arrangements for contact carefully, ensuring that the focus remains on children's well-being and supporting them to maintain good relationships.

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

The safety and well-being of children is prioritised with a high priority placed on robust safeguarding practices. Foster carers receive a range of safeguarding training, which starts from their 'skills to foster' preparation course and continues during their time as foster carers. This includes training on missing procedures, the risks of child sexual and criminal exploitation, radicalisation and internet safety. This ensures that foster carers have good insight and understanding about the impact that trauma and abuse has on children's development and behaviour.

Foster carers are confident and understand their roles well. They demonstrate a robust understanding and knowledge of their responsibilities as foster carers. As a result, children who have experienced high levels of trauma and/or exploitation are helped to 'make sense' of their previous experiences. Children are provided with much-needed reassurance and nurture. A social worker commented, 'The foster carers' understanding of the trauma experienced by my young person resulted in him not feeling excluded for his challenging behaviour. They provided understanding and security, which has resulted in significant improvement in his overall well-being.'

The agency has a diverse range of skilled and experienced foster carers. This means that they can usually find a good match to meet the needs of children referred by placing authorities. Commissioners and placement officers stated that they appreciate the fact that the agency shows a high level of professionalism when managing new referrals. All commissioners spoken to commented that the agency will only take referrals where it is confident that foster carers can meet the child's needs. When the agency assesses that it cannot meet the needs of a newly referred child, it is always very clear to commissioners as to the reasons why.

Local authority safeguarding officers confirmed that the agency has good

safeguarding practices in place and acts in a prompt and transparent way. Children feel protected from harm. Children spoken to during the inspection all reported feeling safe and said that they can speak about any concerns or issues with their foster carers. Foster carers demonstrate a commendable level of understanding of the often-complex needs of the children living with them. Foster carers respond to situations with great skills and sensitivity.

The agency benefits from a core group of foster carers who have longevity with the agency. They have a strong support system in place. A 'buddy system' offers support and provides experienced and newly approved foster carers with helpful advice and insight into any placement difficulties.

Foster carers confirmed that the support received from the agency is excellent. Due to the stability of supervising social workers, many of the foster carers have built relationships of confidence and trust in the agency. A foster carer informed the inspector, 'The agency is always there for me, the support it offered to me in a time of great difficulty has been second to none. The agency staff care about us as individuals, not just as foster carers for children.'

The agency employs a support worker who undertakes direct work with children on such issues as internet safety and independence planning. They use a range of materials and resources to support children with any identified areas of concern or need. The support worker also provides additional support to foster carers, leading to increased placement stability.

Placement planning is robust and addresses all aspects of risk. Safe care plans are individual to each child and are based on a detailed understanding of the child's experiences. The service operates within a 'safer caring' framework.

Incidents of children going missing from their foster placements and associated risk-taking behaviours are rare. Regularly reviewed risk assessments enable foster carers to respond to any situations with confidence and competence. Foster carers and the agency staff know the children placed with them so well that they can pre-empt situations and effectively use de-escalation techniques. Close and proactive partnership working relationships, including with birth family members, lead to secure and safe placements.

A strength of the agency is the fostering panel. The panel is well organised, quorate and has a diverse and experienced membership. It is an effective gatekeeping mechanism, committed to safe, stable and secure placements for children. The panel chair is an experienced, competent social work professional who ensures good scrutiny of the cases presented to the panel and robust management of recommendations on prospective foster carers. Panel minutes provide the agency decision-maker with clear recommendations on the panel decision-making processes. Panel members have access to a range of appropriate training.

The agency has robust systems in place to ensure that the recruitment and vetting process for foster carers, panel members and staff promotes the safety and well-being of children. In addition, the agency's clear and comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures keep children protected from harm.

The monitoring of significant events by managers ensures that they are followed up

quickly, with management oversight to prevent drift. Each incident is carefully analysed, looking at lessons learned to prevent reoccurrence. Ofsted receives all notifications in a timely manner.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager of this agency is exceptionally skilled and committed to her role. Agency staff, foster carers and other professionals consistently praised her style of leadership and management. She leads by example and states, 'My view is that if I support my social workers well, they in turn support the foster carers well, who then support the children well.' This ethos is clearly working, as evidenced during this inspection from discussions with all staff, foster carers and children. Children benefit from this level of consistency, which is reflected in very stable placements with few unplanned endings.

Foster carers refer to being part of a 'family' around the child, feeling valued and professional. Agency staff speak with dedication about their roles and the successes of the children placed with their foster carers. All foster carers, irrespective of longevity with the agency, stated their reason for choosing to foster with this agency as being down to the child-centred attitude of the registered manager and the stable staff team.

The registered manager displays commendable knowledge and insight into foster carers' abilities and the needs of children placed with them. There is a robust referral and placement matching process in place. There is good emphasis placed on the matching of children's needs in this agency.

All foster carers spoken to were very clear that no pressure is placed on them to accept a placement if either staff or foster carers do not feel the match is right. The registered manager's knowledge on the complexity of children in placement can result in a decision not to place another child with a foster carer, irrespective of the number of children the carer is approved for. This ensures the highest level of support to the placed child and the foster carer. Such consideration and attention to detail has led to placement stability.

It is of note how effectively staff have supported children when they have experienced a change of social worker. Managers raise concerns with placing authorities, but also ensure that agency staff and foster carers provide the necessary support to the child. This reflects a registered manager and staff team that go above and beyond their roles.

Managers and foster carers are strong advocates for children. They do not hesitate to challenge placing authorities to ensure that services and support are in place.

Managers have devised systems that monitor and track the performance and delivery of the fostering service. For example, children's individual outcomes trackers are reviewed at appropriate intervals. This review ensures that foster carers and staff understand individual progress and quickly identify any shortfalls in support that may have an impact on achieving better outcomes for children. However, individual progress is based on the individual view of the allocated staff member. There is no independent monitoring of individual children's progress and the views

of the child are not obtained in the process.

A strength of the agency is the extensive and highly relevant training for foster carers. Learning and face-to-face courses equip foster carers with a wide range of skills and knowledge. Each foster carer has a personal development plan in place. However, these plans would benefit from setting out how the agency will support experienced foster carers in their continued development. Agency staff have access to training. However, there is no formal training and development programme in place.

Agency staff are qualified and experienced and receive regular and valuable supervision. The needs of children are central to all formal supervision and appraisal meetings. Foster carers and staff reported gaining a lot from supervision, with staff receiving clinical support undertaken by an independent therapist.

Managers understand the strengths and areas for improvement of the service. An aspirational but realistic development plan is in place.

Managers have completed regulation 35 quality of care monitoring reports evidencing the agency's internal quality assurance review. This provides an evidence-based overview on the continual development of the service.

All recommendations made as a result of the last inspection have been met. Foster carers now have a comprehensive training matrix. The fostering panel has access to a health professional. The children's guide is available in differing formats to meet the needs of children placed. However, the complaints procedure is not easily accessible.

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 differences 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

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Inspector

Juanita Mayers, social care inspector



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