

Orange Grove Fostercare Three Shires

Orange Grove Fostercare Ltd, Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Milton Keynes
MK17 8LX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Orange Grove Fostercare is an independent fostering agency. It is a part of Partnerships in Children's Services, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sovereign Capital. Following a change of corporate ownership, the agency was registered in February 2015 but had operated in a similar form for some years before this. In September 2016 this agency merged with the Three Counties branch under the Three Shires registration. The agency operates from two offices; the head office in Milton Keynes and the other in Bromsgrove.

The agency recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of long- and short-term placements for children and young people on behalf of the local authorities that commission its services. At the time of this inspection the agency was providing placements to 99 children in 88 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 June 2018

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: 7 December 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Staff and foster carers are committed to ensuring that children and young people receive the care that they need to flourish.
- Children and young people feel safe and valued by their carers. They form strong relationships through the development of secure attachments and a sense of belonging. They achieve permanency in many cases.
- Children and young people enjoy good health and do well in education through the proactive and effective support of their carers.
- Recruitment is strong, providing an increasing pool of approved foster carers. Carers benefit from comprehensive support and training that equip them to care for children and young people well.
- Staff and carers demonstrate a good understanding of the vulnerabilities of children and young people placed with the agency. This knowledge is used to manage risks to children effectively, taking their age and ability into account.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- There is a little dissonance between the therapeutic model and the behaviour management approach used in the agency. The records maintained by foster carers of any consequences for undesirable behaviour are not consistent. This inhibits effective management oversight of these matters and misses opportunities to identify where additional support may be necessary to maintain a placement.
- The panel is not fully consistent in its consideration of the assessments of prospective foster carers.
- There are gaps in foster carers' records of children's progress and experiences. This means that not all children and young people may be able to have access to and understand their life stories over time.
- Agency records about matching a child with a foster carer and risk assessments are not consistently completed.

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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 35(1)(a))</p> <p>In particular, the use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home. (Schedule 6(8))</p>	31/07/2018

Recommendations

- Foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication. Prescribed medication is only given to the child for whom it was prescribed, and in accordance with the prescription. Children who wish to, and who can safely keep and take their own medication, do so. (NMS 6.10)

In particular, demonstrate how children have been assessed as safe to take their own medicine.
- The fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. (NMS 15.1)

In particular, evidence the matching considerations and how any identified gaps will be addressed.
- Children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. (NMS 2.1)

In particular, develop practice in respect of children's understanding and appreciation of their heritage.
- Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation). (NMS 4.1)

In particular, ensure that risk assessments and actions to reduce risk are current and reflect the known risks to and vulnerabilities of each child and young person.
- It is in everyone's interest to resolve cases as quickly as possible, consistent with

a fair and thorough investigation. All allegations must be investigated with priority so as to manage cases to eradicate any unnecessary delays at every stage of an investigation. Target timescales are shown below for different actions in the summary description of the process. The time taken to investigate and resolve individual cases depends on a variety of factors, including the nature, seriousness and complexity of the allegation, but these targets should be achieved in all but truly exceptional cases. It is expected that 80 per cent of cases should be resolved within one month, 90 per cent within three months, and all but the most exceptional cases should be completed within 12 months. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 para 3.80)

- All foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. The fostering service's policy is made clear to the responsible authority/placing authority, child and parent/s or carers before the placement begins or, in an emergency placement, at the time of the placement. (NMS 3.8)

In particular, ensure a consistent and shared understanding between the approved behaviour management and therapeutic models.

- 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 are up to date and contribute to an understanding of the child's life and the progress they have made.

- The registered provider has a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the service, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the service's current operation and resource. (NMS 18.2)

In particular, ensure targets effectively inform the agency development plan.

- The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. (NMS 14.8)

In particular, provide refresher training to ensure that all members are consistently thorough in their consideration of assessments.

- The registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend. (NMS 29.1).

In particular, provide updates to notifiable events where necessary.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people develop secure relationships with their foster carers and many achieve permanence. Children and young people become part of the family, and feel a sense of belonging. Professionals working with the agency comment positively on how well staff and foster carers know the children and young people.

From a secure base, children and young people thrive and enjoy a range of experiences. They participate in activities tailored to their individual interests and abilities. Examples include engagement with local faith groups, swimming, football, Scouts, youth clubs and activity days arranged by the agency.

Young people are clear that they have ample opportunity to express any concerns confidentially to agency staff. There have been no formal complaints made by the children. The agency is considering improvements to how it formally seeks children's and young people's views.

Foster carers encourage children and young people to be ambitious for themselves, and support and promote education effectively. As a result, they have improved attendance and made good progress from their starting points. For example, one child is beginning to sign while his language is developing, and another has quickly improved his reading age by two years and four months.

Foster carers encourage children to learn self-care skills appropriate to their age and ability as part of a continuum of preparation for independence. A professional commented on the progress that children had made in personal hygiene within a week of living with foster carers. Older young people talk about learning financial management alongside cooking, laundry skills and management of their own medication. Their management of their own medication is not underpinned by a written risk assessment to determine that the arrangements are safe. They are supported to consider next steps, and 'staying put' (remaining in the foster household after the age of 18) is an option that a number have chosen. The agency supports these arrangements effectively.

Children and young people benefit from foster carers' support to improve their health. They promote and encourage attendance at routine healthcare appointments, and advocate on behalf of children and young people to good effect.

The agency is vigilant in sharing with foster carers all the information that it receives in referrals for children and young people, and actively chases additional information. The analysis of this, alongside good knowledge of foster carers' skills and interests, informs matching. However, the strength of matching, as seen in the stability of placements, with infrequent unplanned endings, is not always reflected in the supporting records. Children and young people are treated with dignity and respect. In one instance, there is no recognition of the heritage of the young person placed. This misses an opportunity to enhance a young person's sense of their

family history.

Planned moves into and out of foster homes are managed at the pace of the child. A social worker described a structured, planned introduction that enabled a child to make a successful transition. The social worker said 'the foster carer's welcoming approach shone through'.

Children and young people develop an increasing awareness of and ability to manage difficult feelings and emotions. This is achieved through positive relationships with foster carers and their consistent application of the therapeutic framework and maintenance of boundaries.

Children's and young people's frequency of contact is in accordance with their care plan. Foster carers are sensitive to the impact of contact arrangements. If they have concerns about contact, they raise them appropriately and secure change by agreement. Foster carers make positive relationships with the child's family members where this is in the child's best interests.

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

Foster carers and staff have a good understanding and awareness of risk across the fostering task. This is underpinned by regular, relevant training and information sharing from the first contact with the agency, through assessment to approval and thereafter in maintaining registration as a foster carer.

Children and young people placed with the agency go missing infrequently. The placing authorities have not conducted return home interviews with young people after these episodes. The agency is developing systems for monitoring and chasing local authorities to do so. This is in addition to in-house work, looking at potential push-pull factors for the young people and considering links to other vulnerabilities, for example child exploitation.

Foster carers are knowledgeable about and sensitive to any changes in the presentation of children and young people that could indicate substance misuse. They promote conversations with them about this, and encourage young people to reflect on the personal and wider impact of their actions. Foster carers give young people information on substance misuse support and advice, and sustain encouragement to access this. However, some young people do not see their substance misuse as a problem and do not engage. Where foster carers have concerns, these are not always reflected in young people's risk assessments, some of which are also out of date.

A comprehensive training programme for all those working for the agency provides them with access to courses that inform their safer care of children and young people. The majority of foster carers value this and keep their knowledge up to date through regular attendance. The course topics include child exploitation, radicalisation, child protection and gangs. Staff have a very good knowledge of risks in the local areas and use this to inform matching, so as to minimise risks. Staff and foster carers take appropriate action in the light of safeguarding concerns.

They make referrals and notifications as required, with a clear focus on the welfare and well-being of the children placed. In one instance, it was not apparent that a local authority had followed statutory guidance in response to a concern raised, yet this had not been challenged by the agency. The processes for the management of allegations against foster carers are sound and are implemented in practice. Not all investigations are sufficiently timely, and may contribute to a small minority of foster carers feeling unsupported during an investigation. Complaints and concerns are taken seriously and may be allocated to an independent person for investigation.

Foster carers have embraced the agency-approved therapeutic model which underpins their care of and interactions with children and young people. As a result, children and young people feel safe and secure through the application of consistent care, which is reflected in the stability of placements. Those foster carers who use the reflective sessions with an independent worker really value them. They give strong examples of how this understanding has improved how they respond to and manage challenging behaviour. One example given by foster carers was the use of 'time in' rather than 'time out' as a consequence. Foster carers are also trained in a behaviour management method that is not linked to the agency's therapeutic model. This can cause some misunderstanding between professionals and foster carers about how to best support children to change behaviours. Foster carers know that they need to record any instance of restraint. The use of this is very low. Not all foster carers routinely record the use of low-level consequences or sanctions. This inhibits the early identification of any additional support that may be necessary to maintain the stability of a placement, and may evade the required management monitoring.

Children and young people are regularly given the opportunity to talk alone to a trusted adult. This may be the carer's supervising social worker or the family support worker. They are also given contact details for a named person whom they can contact directly if they wish. This service has been used recently, providing reassurance and informing direct work with children.

Health and safety is a feature of unannounced visits to foster carers' homes, and there is good follow-up so that identified issues are addressed.

The agency implements sound recruitment practice, so ensuring that only those assessed as suitable are employed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, there has been considerable change at this agency. In September 2016 it incorporated foster carers and staff from a closing branch of the wider Orange Grove family. Some foster carers have subsequently moved on and there has been some staff turnover. At the time of this inspection, all staff in the Bromsgrove office are part time, and this is having an impact on how well some foster carers feel supported. The agency has recognised this, and a full-time supervising social worker is due to take up post at beginning of July 2018.

A new manager was appointed in mid-April 2018 and is working on her application

for registration. The previous manager and the new manager had a two-week handover period to support a smooth transition. The previous manager remains within the wider organisation in a different capacity.

The new manager has made a really positive impression on the foster carers whom she has met so far. They describe her as responsive and child focused, and they are confident that she will lead the team in promoting positive outcomes for the children and young people placed with the whole agency.

Foster carers, staff and young people themselves can describe in great detail the progress that young people have made from their starting points. However the supporting written evidence is weak. This does not provide children and young people with the information that they need to secure an understanding of their journey in care.

All staff and most foster carers describe a very supportive environment in which they feel valued. Supervision is regular. The new format supports the thinking of the therapeutic model and is encouraging both foster carers and staff to be more reflective. This is informing practice and leading to the development of different approaches which are benefiting children, young people and foster carers. Foster carers identify the regular forums as part of the supportive network. They are also looking forward to the implementation of the peer mentoring scheme which has recently been introduced. Carers are reviewed at least annually. These reviews are undertaken by independent social workers, who provide objective scrutiny and challenge.

Training is a strength of the agency. Staff and foster carers value and enjoy the range of courses provided. The majority of foster carers have personal development plans that reflect both the support needs of the children placed and areas that foster carers are interested in. The agency has identified that a small minority of foster carers do not achieve the 'Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care' within a year of approval. The agency is working towards ensuring that this is achieved by all.

The new manager is coming to know the agency and the effective monitoring systems in place. The committed and involved responsible individual is supporting this. The previous management reports are insufficiently analytical and the actions arising are vague. This is insufficient to demonstrate how the agency plans to improve the quality of care.

There was one recommendation in the last report. It remains the case that updates to notifications are not always made, and this recommendation has been repeated.

Commissioners are very positive about the agency. They describe it as responsive. Examples given included 'They are interested in talking to social workers to get as much information as possible to inform the matching process', 'They work well in partnership' and 'They do what they say they are going to do'.

Recruitment is strong. There has been a steady increase in the number of approved

fostering households.

There is a well-established joint panel led by an experienced and knowledgeable chair. The central list includes members from a range of disciplines. The panel chair has identified the need to increase the diversity of the membership and is actively working to achieve this. Some aspects of the work of the panel are strong, for example the scrutiny of annual reviews and standards of care reviews. However, established panel members have fallen into predictable roles. This may inhibit a robust exploration of assessments. Some assessments have been deferred when the panel considers that more information is required. In other cases, not all aspects of an assessment are identified or fully explored. In addition, the agency has identified a weakness in the agency oversight of the assessments of prospective foster carers undertaken by contracted assessors. The impact of this is that not all assessments fully explore all the issues identified in the report. To address this, an assessment manager has very recently been appointed.

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: SC485761

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