

Orange Grove Fostercare

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC485761
Inspection date	07/12/2015
Inspector	Mr James Harmon
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

Setting address	Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Milton Keynes, MK17 8LX
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Telephone number	01908263488
Email	s.clay@picscare.co.uk
Registered person	Orange Grove Fostercare Ltd
Registered manager	Mrs Susan Purtill
Responsible individual	Vacant
Date of last inspection	

Service information

Brief description of the service

Orange Grove is an independent fostering agency (IFA) registered in February 2015. The agency is based in Milton Keynes and is known as the Three Shires, covering Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, including Milton Keynes and Luton. The agency provides Short-term, long-term, Parent & Child and Specialist placements. The agency has demerged from Hillcrest and integrated into Partnership in Children's Services (PICS) which includes three additional fostering agencies.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure the registered person has a system in place to notify within 24 hours, person and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. This relates to updating of notifiable events (NMS 29.1).

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: Outstanding

The agency has made significant improvements in key areas that have ensured an excellent service for the children and young people in placement.

This is the agencies first inspection since the new registration in February 2015. A new management team has been in place for over a year, this change has been significant. Qualified social workers and experienced family support workers make a stable, consistent team to support placements. The children and young people receive an outstanding service where they feel safe and have stable placements.

The registered manager has incorporated her passion and commitment to children and young people into the agency. Their care has top priority and this has allowed a family atmosphere to be developed where foster carers feels appreciated and children and young people are extremely happy. The tremendous support provided to the highly skilled foster carers has resulted in successful progress for the children and young people. Their achievements are celebrated and they speak highly about their experiences.

Records indicate that positive compliments and feedback has been consistently bestowed upon the agency by professionals, carers and placing social workers. The one requirement and recommendation made at the last inspection have been addressed. Recruitment of new staff has drastically improved and the new children's guide provides the children and young people with age-appropriate information on every aspect of their care including how to complain and access to advocates if needed.

An open compliance issue pertaining to a serious case review was closed during the inspection. The management evidenced that it had thoroughly undertaken an internal investigation that resulted in changes in policies and procedures for parents and child placements. The learning from the investigation will improve how this particular aspect of the service functions day to day.

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: Outstanding

The views of the children and young people are very important to the agency and given high priority. They can freely express themselves on all aspects of their care with the confidence that their views will be taken seriously. They understand what is expected of them and how to complain if needed. Their placements provide them with security allowing positive relationships to be formed and quick settlement into

placements. A young person spoke about their long-standing placement and the relationship with the foster carers. The young person said, 'I feel I can talk to them about anything; I feel like they are my family now.'

The children and young people are assisted to develop insight into their own behaviours by their carers with the support of the agency staff. Well organised and good quality planning determines how their emotional and behavioural needs will be met.

Children and young people that have disabilities are placed with trained carers who understand their complex needs and provide them with specialised care. An example of a foster parent starting a football club for children and young people with disabilities stands out as both innovative and practical. The agency was able to sponsor the team so that uniforms could be provided. A young person currently in placement with the carer who participates on the team has developed confidence and is excelling in all areas whilst learning to lead a normal life.

The children and young people have their health needs met to a high standard. When there are historical concerns for their health, a noticeable improvement occurs based upon good recourse to routine appointments with the dentist, general practitioner and optician, along with any specialist support required.

The children and young people make exceptional progress in their educational attainment. They improve their attendance and academic performance whilst having an appreciation for school. The education advisor for the agency utilises her clear understanding of the educational system to promote opportunities for the children and young people. She successfully challenges the schools to secure support that the children and young people are entitled to such as transportation and bursaries.

Inclusion in the wider family of fosters carers is a common theme among the agency for the children and young people. They are accepted and have good relationships with the biological children of their carers. Their attendance at family outings and annual holidays helps them feel part of the family. Several children and young people were able to discuss the family outings and activities undertaken with their carers.

The ability of the foster carers to establish safe, trusted relationships with the significant others of the children and young people has allowed them to maintain family ties. They have a good sense of their identity and maintain their relationships as the agency and foster carers provide safe contact direct and indirectly.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The purposeful and detailed training available to carers was evidenced during the inspection. The training supports their care of the children and young people placed with them. The foster carers are consistently providing stable, well-organised and functional placements for the young people.

The relationship between the agency and their foster carers continues to flourish due to the excellent support and dedication shown to them. They trust the staff and feel valued for their efforts of looking after children and young people. They appreciate being included and having their views taken seriously when care planning for children and young people takes place. The agency takes substantial efforts to ensure the stability of placements by planning activities, arranging support groups and providing any additional services identified as needed. All foster carers spoken to during the inspection praised the level of support they receive from the agency and its open door policy.

The process for becoming a foster carer is very thorough. The agency completes timely and informative assessments of potential applicants. Everyone actively engages with each other allowing for a clear understanding of the expectations involved with being approved. A foster carer said, 'The assessor made me feel comfortable to share my detailed information and the agency as a whole was very welcoming.'

The functioning of the panel is a great strength of the agency. Members have a level of experience in their respective fields. They provide detailed analysis of the information obtained from the assessment process of potential applicants and make reliable recommendations that the agency decision maker rarely disagrees with. All approved carers are reviewed annually. In the new year, the agency will combine with two other fostering agencies to have a joint panel providing a wider range of experienced panel members available.

The agency has been exceptional at matching the children and young people with carers that can meet their individual needs. Potential placements are scrutinised to a very high level with the information available on both the foster carer and the children and young people. Placements are sometimes undertaken on an emergency basis with limited information, however the agency ensures that it obtains the crucial information that is needed before making a decision to go forward with a placement and will actively chase any outstanding paperwork.

The majority of the supervising social workers were previously employed within the local authority. Their experience has contributed to the children and young people achieving stability of placement and other highly positive outcomes. They establish effective relationships with placing social workers and independent reviewing officers. They contribute to the reviews of the children and young people and ensure their care is reviewed and developed accordingly

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people benefit from the staff and foster carers being provided with the skills to keep them safe and protected. This pertains to their ongoing care, their ability to take age-appropriate risk and the acknowledgement of their views.

The agency does not have a high number of incidents of children and young people going missing from care or being at risk of child sexual exploitation. There is an appropriate policy and procedure in place for the actions undertaken for when an incident does occur. The staff response on those occasions was noted as being strong, and their ability to work in partnership with the local authority and the police to protect children and young people was evident.

The safeguarding policies are up to date, clear and comprehensive. Each offers consistent advice and guidance to the entire organisation when dealing with child protection matters. There are separate policies for child sexual exploitation, missing from care and radicalisation which have helped staff and carers understand the importance of managing each and how.

The foster carers are provided with a broad range of training to ensure that children and young people are protected such as radicalisation, safeguarding, internet safety and child sexual exploitation. The variety of training provides them with the strategies to assist in managing their negative behaviours. They understand the risks associated with the children and young people they care for which is major contributing factor to the low number of significant safeguarding incidents for the agency.

All staff including those that do not work directly with the children and young people (such as the panel members) are subject to safer recruitment practices. The successful candidates, prior to being appointed, have their background information scrutinised and verified. The children and young people benefit from the agency employing individuals with good character and intentions.

On one occasion, management failed to provide an update to Ofsted in regards to a safeguarding notification involving a young person. An updated notification was provided during inspection. A recommendation was made based upon the delay in making the information available.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The registered manager has effectively established a culture within the agency where the relationships with external professionals are highly valued. The expectations of the agency and local authority are made clear from the referral process and continue throughout the duration of the placement for children and young people ensuring that their needs are understood and met immediately.

The agency undertakes quality of care monthly and quarterly reporting designed to provide an overview of the agency whilst assisting in the monitoring of the progress for the children and young people. The manager is able to effectively monitor each individual placement. This information then feeds into a comprehensive action plan improving the agency for children and young people.

The statement of purpose, updated in April 2015, provides a clear introduction and insight into the aims and objectives of the agency for anyone involved or interested in the service. The new and improved children's guide is made available to all children and young people that are placed with the agency. One young person said. 'The guide has all the information about the agency from a kid's view and helps me to understand how to resolve an issue.'

Based upon its reputation in the community, the agency has been able to successfully recruit foster carers to compensate for the carers that may have left during the transition. Several skilled carers have transferred from other fostering agencies along with carers that are new to fostering. This action allowed the agency to successfully provide over 10 new placements for children and young people in the weeks leading up to the inspection.

The staff speak highly of the support they receive in relation to their assigned roles within the agency. They believe the training available to them is extensive and specifically relates to practice and procedures relating to children and young people that are fostered. They have supervision that allows them to have formal discussions with management about their allocated placements, their well-being and practice development.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.