

Orange Grove Fostercare

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC485797
Inspection date	22/06/2015
Inspector	David Morgan
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

Setting address	STAFFORDSHIRE OFFICE, UNIT16, NEWSTEAD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, TRENTHAM, STOKE-ON-TRENT, ST4 8HX
Telephone number	01782645060
Email	DeborahSouthwick@orangegrovefostercare.co.uk
Registered person	Orange Grove Fostercare Ltd
Registered manager	Deborah Southwick
Responsible individual	Stephanie Clay
Date of last inspection	N/A

© Crown copyright 2015

Website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

This Independent Fostering Agency is a re-registration of SC384541. This follows a company restructure and change of company's house number, but no change to the delivery of services. The agency is part of a national organisation that provides fostering services across England.

The agency currently supports 120 carers in 65 households caring for 87 children. Placements are primarily short or long term and some carers provide respite care.

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.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

There has been a somewhat turbulent period since the last inspection during which two services were amalgamated, an office closed, and the agency taken over by a larger company. This led to a substantial increase in the size of the agency and its re-registration with Ofsted. However, these changes have not prevented children experiencing excellent outcomes. There is a consistently high level of progress amongst the group. Children benefit from a particularly good level of consistency of local management, staffing and carers, which is reflected in very stable placements.

The model of service includes both family support workers and therapists. This provides robust support to staff, children and 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. Carers are of a high calibre and are energetic and imaginative.

Quality assurance exercises routinely involve the children of carers as well as foster children. There is excellent integration of all stakeholders in the service and this is increasing. This serves to embed loyalty and encourage learning. This attitude plays a key part in children remaining safe and the relatively low level of negative incidents.

This inspection identifies two requirements and three recommendations. These are to improve the quality of training to second carers in particular and to staff; ensuring that all relevant checks are made on new employees; improving the recording of missing from home episodes, and ensuring that electronic files are up-to-date so that relevant information about carers is readily accessible.

Areas of improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets 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
Support, training and information for foster parents: provide foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. This is with regard to each foster carer receiving the specified amount of training and development (Regulation 17(1))	13/08/2015
Ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to employees in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. This is with regard to section 4 and verifying the reasons why previous employments or positions ended (Regulation 20(3))	13/08/2015

Recommendations

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

ensure that foster carers and staff comply with the 'Runaway and Missing from Home and Care' protocol of the local authority where the foster carer lives. This is with regard to ensuring that episodes are correctly categorised as either missing or absent without authority (Volume 4, statutory guidance, paragraph 3.92)

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)

ensure the service implements a written policy that clarifies the content of information to be kept on case files relating to foster carers. This is with regards to ensuring that the working file for each carer is up to date (NMS 26.1)

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The overwhelming majority of children make substantial progress. They establish meaningful and lasting relationships with their carers and therefore feel secure. As a result, children are consistently positive about their carers: 'They're dead nice people' and 'They are kind; helpful and hardworking' are some of their comments. This result has been sustained over time and is reflected in all the consultation processes to which children contribute.

Highly effective procedures mean that almost no children experienced disruptions to their placements last year, which is an exceptional feature of the service. This means that children benefit as much as possible from the ambitious and enthusiastic care they are offered and feel safe in their foster homes. These factors combine to help many children make remarkable progress. Anecdotal and recorded evidence clearly shows that educational targets, for example, are regularly exceeded and social and emotional progress is huge. Attendance rates in school and other forms of education are unusually high and exclusions are rare and usually brief. Consequently, many children achieve competitive examination results and look forward to moving on to higher education or careers of their choice, which currently includes veterinary nursing, apprenticeships, and jobs in the armed forces. Children who have additional needs receive prompt support, for example from tutors. As a result, one child who was expected to achieve an 'F' got an 'A' grade. Family support workers undertake targeted work with children too. They address specific issues, for example, if a child is not benefitting as much as possible because he or she is bullying other pupils.

A major cause of such good progress is the strong emotional and psychological recoveries made by many children. In some cases they show remarkably rapid improvement. Children who were completely disengaged from society have reintegrated in short periods of time thanks to carer's support that is informed by the therapists. Rather than staying in bed as a means of protecting herself, for example, one is now pursuing a career path, engaging in hobbies, and perceives herself and her future very positively. A local authority social worker said, 'The carers have a good understanding of attachment, development and loss. They have excellent interaction with other agencies.' One teenager said her birth family had learnt to accept 'the new, confident me'. Children receive the support and advice they need with regards to their personal circumstances, including their sexuality. Many carers say their foster children are now calmer, even when dealing with emotional issues. This allows them to access the wide range of opportunities on offer. Small and poignant steps to recovery are equally vital, for example one child learnt it was necessary to undress before bathing; another learnt not to eat crayons and plastic, and an older child discovered that different weather conditions require different types of clothing.

All children have at least one stimulating interest or hobby outside their foster homes, which they pursue at least weekly, and most have several. Sports and other physical activities feature highly and serve to ensure that children achieve good

physical health. One said, 'It [fostering] allows me to do a lot of fun things that I would not be able to do at home.' All their routine health checks are up-to-date. Children acknowledge the improvement this makes to their self-esteem and confidence because they have lost weight, gained friends or developed a new expertise. Children feel able to make their views known too. They contribute to an excellent range of consultation processes. In some cases this directly improves their personal circumstances. Several children have successfully used advocacy services to complain about their social worker's lack of support or about a planned move elsewhere that would have disrupted a stable placement. One child said, 'The agency was there with me every step of the way.' In other cases, the involvement of children has helped to improve the fostering service, for example when they have assisted with job interviews. Young people are often helped to remain in their foster households after their eighteenth birthdays and they receive additional personal support to prepare them for independence. This helps them achieve the highest level of economic well-being.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The quality of care provided to children is good overall but exceeds that standard in several areas. A high calibre of carer is recruited and they receive a particularly good level of support. One local authority social worker commented recently: 'If she is the standard of foster carer you provide we are likely to have many more children coming through the system with nothing but positive outcomes.' In addition, there is routine input from therapists and family support workers, which is a benefit that is relatively uncommon amongst fostering agencies. This is perceived as being of an 'exceptionally high standard' by carers and supervising social workers.

Foster carers are ambitious for the children they look after. They fully understand the need for children to make as much progress as possible and act accordingly. They proactively seek knowledge from the professionals around them and undertake their own research so they can address children's needs effectively. Carer's own children are seen regularly by supervising social workers and their role in fostering households is valued highly. As carer's own children said, 'Being a fostering family is hard', and, 'Fostering can be intrusive but the agency tries to avoid this.' The success of this is demonstrated in the outstanding outcomes experienced by children. Such success is also facilitated by highly effective recruitment and support of carers. Accurate matching of children is also evident, for example regarding any needs arising from their backgrounds, gender or religion.

Carers feel integrated into the service. Consultation with them is of a high order and action is taken to address their concerns. This has recently included the reintroduction of a local office and improved allowances. This approach has been imperative during the organisational changes that have occurred since the last inspection, which have been challenging to some carers. Innovative practice is occurring with the involvement of carers in the provision of training and support of each other. Nearly all carers describe their supervising social workers as 'excellent'.

They consider their relationships with staff to be a vital support, which is always available. All staff are extremely knowledgeable about the carers and their families. This is a valuable contribution towards the effective matching led by the placements team.

The recruitment and assessment of new carers is equally effective. It reflects the service's annual plan and is resuming again after a slight downturn caused by the changes. One recently approved carer represented the views of most by writing, 'We went to several open days and this company was so much more professional [than the others] and the training was better organised; such a good first impression!' Several spoke about the 'family feel' of the service, which the manager is keen to maintain in spite of the recent integration with other agencies. Only a high calibre of applicant is accepted, which is demonstrated by the particularly high percentage of interested parties who are not recruited. As part of potential carer's initial (Skills to Foster) training, their own children receive direct training and advice from a family support worker. This provides both the birth children and the service with invaluable information and support. Birth children acknowledge that this high level of engagement by the service continues afterwards and is an important contribution to placement stability.

A high standard of training and development is provided to main carers. Increasingly varied methods of support are used, including the use of on-line resources and one-to-one tuition. Research is used to improve the content of training courses about issues such as child sexual exploitation, behaviour management and foetal alcohol syndrome. These are important developments that keep practices up-to-date. Also, in the case of the new behaviour management training, it provides a consolidating ethos for the new organisation. The integration of carers into training roles is well established and is developing further. However, the training of secondary carers has not progressed sufficiently since the last inspection. It remains the case that the second carers in households do not always complete either the core training or sufficient subsequent training and development to demonstrate the skills required of them. Consequently, this issue is not sufficiently well reviewed by panel or the reviewing officer. The potential risks that this poses are significantly reduced by the regular meetings between each carer and their supervising social workers and the high level of engagement by the main carers. The training records for some carers have not migrated between electronic storage systems during the recent amalgamation of two registered agencies. The information is not lost but is not as readily available as required for supervising social workers and other personnel to use in the support and assessment of carers. This affects only a small number of carers and has a relatively low impact.

A further important development is the recent implementation of a placement tracker system. This shows how children are progressing on a range of indicators and promises to be a vital resource for staff and placing social workers. Further work is underway to refine the descriptors and ensure that scoring is accurate. Carers contribute to the trackers via their own reports. These are very detailed and give a flavour of children's progress.

The arrangements for panel are under review. While this and the recent

reorganisations have created some uncertainty, panel has continued to operate well. The panel chair is aware that developmental opportunities for panel members have been limited lately and this is part of the review. Panel receive review reports after carer's first and third years. This is good practice and serves to keep panel members up-to-date with the impact of their recommendations. In addition, post-allegation review reports also go to panel for its observations. Other annual reviews are chaired by an independent person to ensure robustness. Altogether, this is a strong system that provides the necessary challenge to the agency.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

A good level of safeguarding is provided to children. Carers and their families are taught effectively about the subject and what to do if they have concerns. The receipt of unsolicited gifts by a child, for example, was recently identified by a carer as a possible indicator. Clear processes are in place to ensure that policies are followed accurately, for example by using an additional risk assessment if a child is at risk of sexual exploitation. In practice, there is a low level of safeguarding concerns because of effective protection and prevention. The agency actively pursues local authority personnel if guidelines are not being followed and levels of protection are being compromised.

An improved risk assessment process has been introduced recently that permits more accurate assessment of risk levels. This is not yet fully established in practice and minor errors are occurring. Nevertheless, it is an important contribution to providing a more proportionate approach to risk-taking behaviours and in showing changes to the levels of risk. The process means that carers can expose children to age-appropriate risks in a structured way that is vital to their development and progress. Children welcome this approach.

Insufficient attention is paid to the work histories of prospective employees when they have had previous duties with children or vulnerable adults. This increases the potential risk of unsuitable people working with children but is ameliorated somewhat by thoroughness in other areas.

Children feel safe in their foster homes. They know who to contact with any concerns and have regular conversations with a range of different adults. They are familiar, for example, with their carer's supervising social workers. Carers promptly engage independent advocates, when necessary. Also, children learn to protect themselves, whether it is in public, on-line or in their choice of activities. Risks are explained in detail to them as are the strategies needed to reduce harm. As a result, children represent themselves appropriately and expect a high standard of respect in their relationships. This is an invaluable part of their progress. The implementation of behaviour management policies are checked by supervising social workers. This has highlighted some variations in practice throughout the new organisation, which is being extremely well addressed through the roll-out of a new and bespoke system. Hardly any physical interventions have been required in the past year. Carers are not

expected to use such holds unless it has been agreed or is an emergency. This is good practice and serves to protect the dignity and safety of all concerned.

The level of risk for children who are missing or absent without authority is low in the vast majority of cases. Engagement with other professionals is good and the service is highly regarded by social workers and commissioning officers. However, the data about children who are missing is over-estimated. This is because of a slight shortfall in the understanding of the statutory guidance on children who run away.

Complaints and allegations occur at a low level and carers and staff understand the whistleblowing procedure. Incidents are treated seriously and systematically. Rigorous action is taken to ensure that high standards of professional conduct prevail and include making referrals to professional registration bodies. The manager is able to demonstrate how lessons are learnt from such events and contribute to improving the quality of the service.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Local leadership of the service is highly regarded by all concerned. There is a consensus from children through to commissioners that the manager 'is excellent and very supportive'. She is suitably qualified and experienced and ensures the service works well with other professionals. Of particular significance is the fact that she has facilitated excellent outcomes for children during a difficult period. This is in line with the service's Statement of Purpose. The perception of the organisation as a whole by carers and staff is influenced by the two reorganisations, the first of which was insufficiently well explained to them. Subsequently, there have been reasonable efforts to visit carers and staff to explain the expectations of the new company. All parties are now looking forward keenly to a period of consolidation and improvement; most recognise the positive benefits of the increase in scale. Any negative effect on most carers and on children has been minimal, which is to the credit of all concerned.

The latest reorganisation meant that the agency had to re-register with Ofsted. This means that legally it is now a new agency. The manager has ensured that the six recommendations raised in the last inspection have been addressed. This has resulted in improved attention to carer's profiles that are given to new children and improved panel minutes. Monitoring has improved through being more evaluative of the facts and figures.

A good range of monitoring exercises is used that includes fully established consultation exercises with children and carers. These contribute to the local service plan that shows how the service will change in the following year. Improvements have been made to the service as a result of such local consultation. For example, an increase in carer's allowances and the presentation of carer's training. The company is also spearheading improvements. This has led to additional managerial posts, for example for safeguarding and quality assurance, and a new IT-system. The role of

the two family support workers has been refined and fostering vacancies have fallen.

The team of one team manager (who is also the deputy manager); seven supervising social workers; two administrative staff, and two family support workers feel there is a good level of support. They each have their own development plans showing how they will improve their skills over the next year. A variety of training events have been attended recently and supervising social workers in particular provide training to carers. As a result, their involvement in training is substantial even though the training programme provided for them is limited.

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.