

Orange Grove Fostercare

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC485809
Inspection date	25/01/2016
Inspector	Juanita Mayers
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

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Registered person	Orange Grove Fostercare Ltd
Registered manager	Mrs Abigail Sherlock
Responsible individual	Vacant Post
Date of last inspection	N/A

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This Independent Fostering agency is a re-registration of SC035213. It 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. It operates from a main office in the London borough of Bromley with a smaller hub office in Essex.

There are four supervising social workers and a Registered Manager providing support for 46 fostering families looking after 41 children and young people. Placements are primarily short or long term and some carers provide respite care. The agency provides a range of emergency, short, and long-term placements, parent and child and staying put arrangements.

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**

This is the first inspection under a new company registration. There has been a somewhat turbulent period during this time with the taking over of the agency by a larger company. The changes unsettled some staff and foster carers; however, the new manager has stabilised and raised the morale and continuing commitment of staff and foster carers to the young people.

The service provision includes family support workers, therapists and education consultants. This ensures a robust team offering good levels of support to young people, foster carers and staff which sustains placements and encourages good

practice.

The agency's manager and social workers know young people and foster carers well, they closely monitor placements, ensuring young people make good progress and enjoy positive experiences of foster care in a safe way. All young people report that they feel safe and well cared for.

Young people are making good progress in all areas of their development. Their educational attainment is good and for some, significant when compared to their starting point. Children and young people are engaged in a range of activities and learn to build and develop relationships in and out of the fostering households. Health needs improve through foster carer's good understanding of the individual needs of children.

The agency is well managed by an experienced manager. An experienced staff team are appropriately supervised and trained. Social workers report having manageable caseloads and know their carers well. Foster carers are highly experienced, of a high calibre and are energetic and committed to ensuring the best outcomes for young people. Training for foster carers is of a good standard. Fostering assessments are thorough, evaluative and provide an accurate view of the competence, attitudes and suitability of the applicant to foster children and young people.

This inspection identifies three recommendations. These are to improve the availability of training for foster carers, in particular those who are hard to reach; ensuring the children's guide is available in different communication methods and ensuring that a health advisor is part of the agency's central list, to advise on the needs of children and young people with complex health needs.

Areas for improvements

Recommendations

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

ensure the fostering panel have regular representation from a child health professional (NMS 14.6)

ensure the children's guide is available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative methods of communication (NMS 16.6)

ensure training is made available to foster carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. This is in regards to ensuring that training is provided in a flexible way to meet the needs of hard to reach foster carers (NMS 20.8)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Young make good progress in all areas of their social, educational and personal development. Foster carers provide them with stable, nurturing placements, which enable them to lead fulfilling lives. A young person said, 'We are just a regular family, we sometimes disagree but that's what families do. I know I am loved and will live here until I am ready for more independence.' Foster carers are very proud of the progress their young people make, and take pride in the positive changes they make to improve and enrich their lives.

Young people benefit from living in stable and well-supported placements. The agency works effectively with placing authorities and commissioners to ensure that young people and their carers' are prepared well for placements. A strength of the agency is the hard work undertaken to ensure a good match between young people and foster carers who are suitable to meet their needs. This ensures that placements are planned where possible, even in short notice situations. Information sharing is good, enabling placements to start in a positive way. A commissioner stated, 'This is an agency who know the strengths and weakness of their carers, they are transparent with information, thus we experience very little placement breakdown.'

Foster carers provide a welcome introduction to their home. Young people receive an age appropriate children's guide together with a memories box to begin the journey of their fostering experience. However, the guide is not sufficiently available in different formats to meet the needs of all young people. Young people develop good enduring relationships with their foster carers that nurture them and help to grow and mature. The agency has a significant number of young people in long-term placements. They have a commitment to permanency. This extends to foster carers deciding to adopt young people placed with them and an increase in young people 'staying put'.

Good levels of support and advice for foster carers help support the stability of placements of even the most complex young people. The agency uses family support workers, an independent therapist and educational advisors. These all help to support stability of placement. A foster carer said, 'We experienced challenges on a daily basis with our young person, the placement could have ended at any time over the past few years if it was not for the excellent help and support we received.'

The agency has a strong ethos of keeping siblings together, and the majority of placements enable this to happen. Where this is not possible the agency try to place young people with foster carers who work in partnership to ensure consistency of care and the maintenance of positive bonds. Foster carers are committed to regular contact to maintain family ties. They facilitate contact where possible, inviting relatives to their home, or meeting at mutually convenient locations where young people and significant people in their lives can interact in a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

Young people's voices have a significant impact on their care and the agency advocates strongly on their behalf where necessary. Supervising social workers and foster carers are robust in ensuring that local authorities and relevant professionals listen and act on young people views. For example fosters carers have advocated strongly on behalf of young people where plans have not been in their best interest or assessments have not fully focused on positive changes. This ensures young people feel listened to, cared for and understand that their views have a significant contribution to their progress and development.

Young people are consulted about their care and are involved in many aspects of the running of the agency. They have been involved in the recent recruitment of a family support worker. They also contribute to foster carers training. They share their views during foster carer's reviews and staff appraisals. Supervising social workers work with young people, including birth children of foster carers to gain their views and use these to further develop the agency.

The agency and foster carers provide young people with a broad range of social, educational and spiritual opportunities. Young people are pursuing interests and hobbies in an out of the home. They are encouraged to form friendship networks out of the home. For example, young people participate in youth clubs, guides, dance and ice-skating. This help to improve social and independence skills and language development. Young people visit and participate in places of worship of their choice. There is respect for religious traditions, including where necessary facilities for daily prayer.

Positive outcomes for young people vary dependent on their individual needs and starting points. For some young people maintaining placement stability and preventing life chances further deteriorating is significant and positive progress.

Young people have good school attendance and are achieving academically from their starting points. They are achieving educational key stages and positive recognition of their continued efforts. 98% of young people of mandatory school age are in education. There is effective liaison with virtual heads and active use of the pupil premium to ensure young people receive extra tuition, play therapy and access to laptops. A young person said, 'My family have inspired me and shown me what can be achieved, I now am working to improve and hope to be a doctor one day.'

The agency recognises the importance of good outcomes for young people. The use of an education specialist evidences this commitment. They aim to raise positive outcomes for young people through increased tracking for each young person using the 'five outcomes' principle. Action plans and the setting of goals and targets further evidence this. Foster carers pride themselves on providing an environment where learning is an integral part of the home.

Young people enjoy healthy lifestyles, supported by nutritious and well balance diets and effective medical interventions. Health outcomes improve, they receive their inoculations promptly, and dental health is regularly monitored.

Effective planning and preparation results in young people learning and achieving the

necessary and essential skills for adulthood. Carers instil knowledge and skills and provide young people with safe environments where they practice and successfully develop these skills. Young people's confidence increases as they take on greater levels of responsibility for themselves and their self-care.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency provides a good service to its foster carers, young people placed and local authorities and commissioners it works with. It has a good understanding of the strengths of its carers and the needs of fostered young people and the evolving demands of local authorities.

The service has a good retention rate, therefore young people benefit from being well cared for by highly experienced foster carers. Of the 46 current carers, over 80% have been with the agency in excess of 6 years. This includes 5 carers who have been with the agency for over 10 years. The agency has a sufficient range of carers to meet the diverse cultural, religious and gender needs of young people.

Local authorities unanimously provided positive feedback on the agency. One highlights the 'experience and commitment of foster carers.' Another comments on 'An agency where young people come first.' Foster carers and social workers confirms that the agency 'prioritises the needs of young people.'

The agency maintains and keeps its recruitment activity under review based on strategic planning, the evolving needs of local authorities and its understanding of the ever growing demand for parent and child and unaccompanied minor placements. They respond promptly to all enquires and initial screening is robust. Prospective foster carers commented on the warmth of the agency and the relevance of information provided at the initial stage. Consequently, few foster carers withdraw after the assessment process begins. Assessments of prospective foster carers are generally insightful, evaluative and of a good quality. This ensures only the best applicants go forward to the panel. An independent assessor stated, 'This is an agency who seeks to recruit the best carers. They value my expertise, I do not feel pressured to pass unsuitable applicants through.' Timely assessments ensure that applicant's suitability is promptly checked without unnecessarily deterring carers.

The agency has a strong fostering panel with a broad range of expertise. The panel chair is highly experienced and brings a wealth of social work expertise. Panel training takes place at least annually. Procedures are well written and support good practice. The central list is well balance with regard to expertise, culture and gender. However, the panel lacks the expertise of a child health professional to give advice and recommendations on the approval or re-approval of carers who are caring for or likely to care for young people who have complex medical needs. The rigorous and effective panel together with the meticulous approach of the decision maker ensures the best interests of children are promoted through the quality of carers approved by

the agency.

Foster carers confirm they receive a high level of support and training from the agency. Many describe their supervising social worker as an exceptional worker who will always go the extra mile. They particularly appreciate the longevity of the social work team. Several stated 'If my social worker is unavailable, I do not have to go through explaining the needs of my young person, they all know us well and give maximum support'. Another commented 'We work as a family, who recognise there are professional boundaries that should not be crossed.' Supervising social workers are strong advocates for carers and young people and undertake a range of tasks on their behalf. For example, they accompany foster carers to significant meetings for young people and support them in advocating on changes to care plans, when these are not in the best interest of young people.

The majority of foster carers benefit from good training opportunities. A foster carer said, 'the manager listens to us, previously much of the training was repetitive, this has now changed and training is good and much more relevant.' Recent training has focused on the government 'prevent agenda', safeguarding and social resilience. The agency has individual personal development plans to identify future training needs more effectively. However, despite the achievements in providing relevant high quality training, the planning of training day's results in some carer's not attending key courses. This means that some carers are not kept up to date with issues affecting young people.

All of the agency's foster carers have completed their Training, support and Development workbooks within timescales. Experienced foster carers contribute to the initial skills to foster training, enabling new carers to benefit from the practical experiences of their colleagues.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Young people are kept safe and their welfare is promoted in this agency. Young people confirm that they feel safe in their foster home. They know who to turn to if they feel vulnerable or have concerns about anything and confirm that they know who to speak to if they wish to make a complaint. No young people have chosen to make a complaint, however they receive support to contact independent agencies if they need to and say they know staff within the agency to speak to. One commented 'The agency social worker always makes time to speak with me, if anything makes me unhappy or I want changing I know he will sort it, they are good like that.'

There is good matching of young people with foster carers who understand and can meet their individual needs. Good placement support ensures that young people remain safe and have their well-being promoted. Regular reviews and updates of young people's safer caring plans and individual risk assessments takes place and

foster carers supervision monitors the safety of, and progress made by young people. The agency has developed a strategic internal safeguarding panel under the management of a safeguarding manager. All safeguarding concerns are scrutinised to quickly identify patterns and trends. Effective action is taken to protect those young people at risk, review plans for them and to explore lessons learned and share good practice.

The agency does not have a high number of incidents of young people going missing from care and being at risk of child sexual exploitation. There are appropriate policies and procedures in place on the action to take should an incident occur. Staff responses on these occasions is based upon their ability to work in partnership with the local authority and the police whilst protecting the young people

Updated safeguarding policies are comprehensive and clear. Each offers consistent advice and guidance to the entire organisation when dealing with child protection matters for young people. There are separate policies for child sexual exploitation, missing from care and radicalisation.

Foster carers understand the significant role they play in keeping young people safe and protected from harm. They are provided with a broad range of training, such as radicalisation, safeguarding and internet safety. This equips them with the confidence and skills to work with others to reduce risk and care for young people who have experienced abuse. This contributes to the low number of safeguarding incidents for the agency.

Supervising social workers carry out mandatory environmental and other hazards assessments and each household has a relevant safe care plan. Unannounced visits take place, with additional specific visits to speak with young people on their own.

Further safeguarding of young people takes place through the robust and thorough recruitment processes for foster carers, staff and members of the central panel.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Good quality, visible leadership and management are strengths of this agency. The Registered Manager has a hands-on approach to management. Local authorities, social workers and foster carers all confirm this and are overwhelming positive about it. This management style motivates staff and foster carers, who feel valued by the organisation, to provide good quality care. Consequently young people benefit from a child focussed service that places them at the heart of service delivery. A commissioner stated, 'The manager understands the strengths and weakness of the agency and their foster carers, consequently placements made have a low level of breakdown. This is an agency that we prioritise when seeking placements.' A social worker commented, 'the agency works well with us, information provided is always relevant, they are transparent and will discuss any

concern. Young people make good progress in this agency and I feel glad to have X placed with the carer.'

The social work team and support staff have appropriate skills, expertise and professional qualifications to deliver a service to foster carers which is child focused and achieves the best possible outcomes for young people. Good, regular supervision with accessible managers effectively supports staff. Supervising social workers operate to a high professional standard. Foster carers appreciate the support they receive from this confident and skilled staff team. This ensures that they maintain a good sense of effective teamwork and the shared understanding that their task is to 'provide the highest quality of substitute family care for young people who cannot live with their birth families'.

The manager has increased the number of social events for young people and these now occur throughout the year. Young people have confirmed their enjoyment of these activities, particularly as they are encouraged to include significant people in their lives. A young person said, 'I enjoy the activities; however they are made even better by allowing me to bring my boyfriend.' This promotes a sense of inclusion and engagement of all involved. The manager uses feedback from these events to improve the quality of future events and to enable young people and foster carers to contribute to the decision making and planning around them.

The manager undertakes quality of care quarterly reports to provide an overview of the agency and the progress for young people. This information feeds into the agency's development plan to improve the outcomes for young people.

The Statement of Purpose for the agency has recently been updated and a copy provided to HMCI. This provides clear information on the ethos of the agency together with its aims and objectives. The children's guide is available to all young people, however it requires further improvement.

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.