

Orange Grove Fostercare

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC485767
Inspection date	24-28 August 2015
Inspectors	Christy Wannop Sandra King
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Independent Fostering Agency

Setting address	Bellway House, 7 Worcester Road, BROMSGROVE, Worcestershire, B61 7DL
Telephone number	01886860833
Email	sclay@picscare.co.uk
Registered person	Orange Grove Fostercare Ltd
Registered manager	Post vacant
Responsible individual	Stephanie Clay
Date of last inspection	N/A

© Crown copyright 2015

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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 privately owned fostering agency is one of seven separately registered branches operated by this company across the country. Orange Grove is part of a much larger national organisation, PICS, that comprises four nationally known agencies. This agency is a re-registration of SC383805. It operates from one main office in Bromsgrove and has recently acquired a new office for meetings and activities, in Dudley

There are currently 34 approved foster carer households. The agency is currently supporting 47 children and young people placed in 25 households. The volume of recruitment over the last year has been low.

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: **Requires improvement**

This is the first inspection under a new company registration in February 2015. However, the service has a long history and has previously established a consistently good quality of care. A period of wider organisational change has unsettled some

staff and foster carers. The previous registered manager left in July. This inspection finds many shortfalls.

Placements are not always well planned to meet the needs of children. Matching is not careful and this weakness threatens stability of placements and the retention of foster carers. Not all assessments are sufficiently clear about key practical information about fostering households. The agency does not always take account of foster carer experience, induction, and training needs, particularly after allegations and unplanned placement endings. Foster carer reviews and changes to approval are not consistently rigorous, nor do they build a picture of patterns in foster carer behaviour.

Much information about children and foster carers on the organisation's electronic recording system is incomplete, incorrect, or irrelevant. The agency has poor systems for tracking the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children. The agency does not hold good records of children's care, placement plans and reviews or delegated authority arrangements.

Recruitment of staff and panel members is not rigorous and systems do not evidence best practice. New staff do not have a proper induction or supervision. Social work staff have no formal learning and development programme.

The system for the review of quality of care does not include consultation with children, parents and placing authorities: it omits key information and does not provide the registered person with the quality of information needed to improve the service.

Despite these areas that require improvement, the agency has many strengths. The consistent core of experienced, skilled, and foster carers have maintained excellent parenting, stability, and good outcomes for children and young people. A small team of family support workers and a therapist provide invaluable direct support to children and young people in placement. The consultant educational advisor is an accessible, clear, and confident advocate for disadvantaged children. Panel is well organised. Placing authorities are very positive about the work of the carers. A local authority commissioning officer said: 'carers are excellent, support is also very good indeed.' The new manager has impressed foster carers, staff, and placing authorities with his active involvement and enthusiasm. Through the period of change and crisis, the fostering provider has ensured that children have been safe. They have the resources and the strategic vision to support the agency to improve.

Areas for 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.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
11	The registered person must ensure that the welfare of children or to be placed with foster parents is promoted at all times, and before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parents due consideration is given to the child's wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding.) This is with specific reference to assessments, matching, placement and review processes. (Regulation 11(a)(b)(i))	30/09/2015
16	The fostering service provider must implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16(a))	30/09/2015
20	The fostering service provider must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit do so and full and satisfactory information is available to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (3), Schedule 1(4)(6))	30/09/2015
21	The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision, and appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a))	30/09/2015
22	The fostering service provider must maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2. (Regulation 22, Sch 2(1)(d)(g))	30/09/2015
35	Maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals and improving the quality of care provided by the fostering agency. The system must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35(1)(2)(3))	30/09/2015
28	When undertaking a review, the fostering service must make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary in order to review whether the foster parents continues to be suitable to be a foster parent, and seek and take into account the views of the foster parent. (Regulation 28(3)(a)(b)(i))	30/09/2015

Recommendations

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

Ensure arrangements for delegating authority from the parents to the local authority and/or from the local authority to the foster carers, must be discussed and agreed as part of the care planning process, particularly at placement planning meetings, and agreements should be recorded in the placement plan. (Volume 4, statutory guidance, page 16, paragraph 3.13)

Give children information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. (NMS 11.3)

Ensure the written report on the person's suitability to be approved, and at review, as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. Specifically that sleeping arrangements, comfort, and space for children is explicit. (NMS 13.7)

Match the child with a placement that meets their needs. Only suggest 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)

Ensure all new foster carers receive an induction (NMS 20.1)

Ensure foster carers receive the support and supervision they need in order to care properly for children placed with them. This with specific reference to implementation of post-allegation review actions and support. (NMS 21)

Ensure a good quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, post qualifying and in-service training, that staff are supported to undertake. (NMS 23.1)

Clarify the purpose, format, and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. (NMS 26.1)

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

Judgement outcome: Good

The agency has had good success in providing enduring placements for many children who need them, including for brothers and sisters. Some children and young people have found permanent families and have been adopted by their foster carers. Foster carers have worked together with placing authorities where the plan for care is a return home. One placing authority was particularly pleased with the successful return of a family to their parents and the contribution made by the foster carers in ensuring this was a positive move for all. The agency has helped young people to 'stay put' with their foster families. An independent reviewing officer said: 'Everything about the placement is fantastic.'

Children still do not routinely have information about the foster carer before arrival. The agency sometimes creates basic profiles of foster carers that the fostering social workers can email to placing social workers to share beforehand even when children arrive in an emergency. However, these are not especially child friendly and are rarely used.

Children and young people feel confident with their foster carers. One family of children clearly felt a strong bond and a sense of security even after a relatively short time. Foster carers provide excellent substitute parenting at a time of trauma and uncertainty. Children and young people feel reassured by a warm welcome into their foster homes. Foster carers respect their cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds. They meet dietary preferences and requirements. They support worship and spiritual heritage. A young person said: 'she loves and cares about us no matter what.'

Children and young people who have experienced extreme trauma have insightful care from foster carers who make a long term commitment to see them into safe and productive adulthood. Another young person said: 'I want to stay here until I'm 100.' Those with risky sexualised or self-harmful behaviour learn to understand the implications of this for their future. A placing social worker talked about one young person's difficulties: 'the carers had managed it well, resulting in his placement being stable and providing a secure base in which to thrive.'

Foster carers and children and young people benefit from the responsive support of a therapist and an educational advisor, who work as consultants for the agency. Not all children have education that provides for their statutory entitlement of 25 hours a week. Opportunities are missed to use the educational advisor to work towards full attendance. Some young people have done very well and are heading for university. Others are making plans for college and getting ready for the exam period.

Children and young people's health is good and those with learning and physical disabilities find homes with skilled foster carers who advocate for them and ensure they have the right equipment and resources. They advise fostering agency staff, foster carers and work directly with children and young people when necessary.

Children and young people share the family leisure interests; they have play opportunities, develop hobbies, and take their first foreign holidays with their foster families. These opportunities extend their horizons and strengthen their positive self-view.

There are strong systems for direct work with children and young people by two experienced, resourceful family support workers. They have provided imaginative support around specific issues, such as safe care, bullying, sexualised behaviour, life story work and have been a key anchor for the day-to-day lives of foster families and their children this year. They also host events, gatherings, activities for foster families, gathering children's and foster carers' views.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: Requires improvement

Approval, matching, and placement processes, some of which are managed outside this agency office, do not reliably prioritise either foster carers or children. There are occasions when the registered person's systems for placement matching and planning have not resulted in clear arrangements or defined responsibilities. Assessments are not focused, because they do not clearly address the fundamental basics of foster care, such as where children will sleep. Matching documentation does not routinely address the distance of foster carer homes from children's schools, or their placing authority, sleeping capacity in a household, or responsibility for educational arrangements. Children do sometimes have to move at the instigation of the independent fostering agency, because matching does not make clear foster carer holiday arrangements, forcing respite at a critical time in placements. Recommendations and decisions about increasing numbers of children who can stay in a foster home do not consider children's comfort or sleeping arrangements. Planning does not secure agreement about responsibilities for essential aspects of children's placements. Consequently, they may not get what they need, such as a foster home within reasonable travelling distance of their school, or a proper bed to sleep in.

Foster carer reviews are not consistently rigorous, nor do they build a picture of patterns in foster carer behaviour. Post-allegation reviews do not report all historical concerns about parenting style and incidents. Reviews of changes to approval category do not take account of the actual sleeping arrangements and do not always include a conversation with the foster carer or the child. It is not clear how actions arising from post-allegation review are taken forward in foster carer supervision and achieved. For example: fostering social workers have not provided the increased frequency of supervision visits recommended; supervision notes do not show a clear plan to deliver the recommendations for specific training in mental health and behaviour management.

Managers, and leaders within the fostering provider's centralised Staffordshire team, do not regularly review their placement processes, matching and disruptions and so do not have the information they need to take any necessary action to improve the

stability of placements and the progress children make. There is no system to learn from disruptions or early endings.

While there are great plans within the fostering provider organisation for future foster carer learning and development, the current baseline is not clear. For example: there is not a clear picture of the current level of success for foster carers achieving the Training and Development Standards within 12 months of approval. Too many foster carers think that they do not need to train, or develop skills in foster care because they fail to attend and engage in what is on offer. The agency does not protect foster carer induction. Poorly supported emergency placements put stress on foster carers and prevent them from attending planned training events and missing post-approval induction visits. Foster carers, who do attend training, feel there has been a real improvement recently, for example about education training: 'I feel I've really learned something.'

The agency's electronic recording systems do not reliably show how many children and young people have an up-to-date local authority placement plan, including delegated authority, or a record of the most recent child in care review on which to base the fostering tasks. The agency ensures that their foster carers are aware of the local authorities' written policy on delegated authority but does not have good information about which children have it- consequently they do not make a consistent effective challenge to local authorities when that authority is not delegated appropriately.

Foster carers do report that they generally have the information they need to care for children and young people. They are resilient and passionate about their lives with disadvantaged children and young people, who thrive in their care because of the quality of their parenting. They help children to make sense of their earlier lives. A placing social worker commented: 'Foster carer fantastic- done a marvellous job, court, and parents, have also been impressed.'

Foster carers can have two weeks of respite routinely, rather than when it is in the child's or young person's best interests. Foster carers do not always need or use this respite support. Many make independent arrangements with their 'back up' carers from within their family or social circle to provide consistent familial care. Foster carers talk highly of the input they get from the fostering social workers too: 'Consistent regular support from each'.

The fostering panel is well organised, quorate and has diverse and experienced membership. The panel chair is an experienced person, previously a responsible individual for the agency. The chair and panel members have an appraisal and contribute their views to the new fostering provider. There is good practice in the expectation that all panel members will make clear their view of any new assessment, a week in advance of the actual meeting. This is good practice and ensures that individual panel members are accountable for their recommendations.

The agency intends to grow, but has faced a challenge to retain foster carers who wish to transfer to local competitors. There is a renewed recruitment strategy for recruitment and retention and the leadership of the new manager has done much to increase foster carer confidence.

The agency makes good provision for the support of placements through creative use of two part time family support workers. They fill a gap when foster carers struggle and provide transport and direct input with children and young people. Access to therapy means that the service can support seamless transfer of work from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to the home. The insightful, challenging, informed, and inspiring educational advisor thinks outside the box to get the best results for the children she works for and is keen to do more. These valuable resources undoubtedly assist with placement stability. An independent reviewing officer described: 'hard work and great cooperation between carers and the young person's social worker.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: Requires improvement

Staff and panel member recruitment and vetting are not thorough and do not comply with statutory requirements. The agency does not routinely seek a full working history, a reference from the person's most recent or relevant employer, verification of why previous employment with children ended, or whether applicants are suitable to work with vulnerable children. Key documents lack the date of completion, for example, on application forms and verification of reference checks.

Relationships with the local authority, the police, health services, schools, and other agencies that protect those children who engage in risk-taking behaviour are not strong or effective currently. The system for tracking safeguarding issues locally has not been completely successful. Local monitoring systems do not ensure follow up of actions arising from critical incidents with foster carers. The previous manager did not monitor and review a referral to the local area designated officer (LADO), or report it to Ofsted. The incidence of children or young people going missing or being at risk of sexual exploitation is not monitored rigorously, but action for individual children is effective in securing their welfare.

The agency has taken effective action to liaise with placing and safeguarding agencies when they have concerns about children and young people's safety, or there are allegations about foster carers. They have taken good care when some children and young people have put themselves at risk when missing from their foster homes or at risk of child sexual exploitation. Where risks have been too high, the agency has been instrumental in challenging placing authorities to find placements that are more appropriate.

The fostering provider has established a safeguarding leader within the wider organisation. This has resulted in good work to: improve the agency's protocols for missing children, as well as training for all in child sexual exploitation and risk assessment; review critical incidents, and collate safeguarding information across the agencies operated by the wider organisation.

Foster carers and fostering social work staff have the information they need to deliver safe care for children and young people. The family support workers make sure they see children and young people alone at least once a quarter. Unannounced visits to foster homes take place once a year. Foster carers and fostering social workers are clear about their responsibilities. They understand the impact of trauma and have training in managing challenging behaviour and safe care. Some foster carers have worked tirelessly to provide safety and unconditional regard for very challenging needs; they take account of the risks that stem from children and young people's earlier experiences. One described her role in planning to avoid unnecessary risk as: 'keeping him safe in a teenage world.' These arrangements result in safe care in safe foster homes.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: Requires improvement

There has been change in leadership since the fostering provider registered the agency under new company arrangements in February 2015. The registered manager resigned and the new appointee joined with a handover during July this year. The new manager is in the process of submitting an application to register with Ofsted.

The agency has experienced a period of difficulty. There has been a high turnover of social work and administrative staff at the office. All posts are now filled and all have worked hard to maintain consistency and bridge any gaps. Some foster carers have transferred to another local agency. Some foster carers have felt a lack of communication and at a distance from the agency, unsettled by changes in the wider and local organisation. Recruitment of new foster carers continues. The new, very engaged manager has impressed remaining foster carers and they are hopeful that he will secure stability. One said, 'it can only get better.' Another described the new manager as, 'brilliant.'

Relationships with partner organisations are not in place because there has been manager and staff turnover and loss of local knowledge. There is some evidence that the opportunity to challenge about educational entitlement and local authority delay in assessing parenting capabilities have drifted because of staff turnover. The new manager and staff have not yet developed partnership working and have not picked up previous contacts: this includes links with geographical stakeholders, both protective and supportive, for example, the police, CAMHS, and safeguarding. The fostering provider does have good organisational links with local authority commissioning and contracting teams, and these are very positive. Placing authorities describe an agency that they know will deliver stability and quality for their children.

Systems to gather, record, evaluate, and act on key information about foster carers, children, and young people are not effective. Electronic systems for tracking outcomes for children and young people are not fully utilised. Individuals still working for the agency can remember children's beginnings and progress, but the manager

cannot do this from the agency's records. The information held electronically does not provide the fostering provider with the information most likely to lead to improvements in children's care. There are examples of copious recording about the intimate medical conditions of people who are not foster carers, but information such as the name of a child's school is missing. The register of each child placed with foster parents is unreliable. It contains incorrect information about children's statutory provision and no information about their address prior to placement. There is not a record that is useful to children and would contribute to an understanding of their life.

Current quarterly reporting systems, to meet the requirement to review the quality of care, do not include information about how the work of the foster carers complies with care plans, or whether children have a current care plan. The fostering provider does not have good quality information about children missing from care, or useful information about their educational attendance, GCSE entries, exclusions, or statutory entitlements. Information about children's medication regimes, or the quality of recruitment checks is not well reported. Systems for quality review do not include action in response to consultation with children, foster carers, and placing authorities.

All three permanent fostering social workers are child focused, qualified social workers; two have worked here for only a few months. The agency does use four self-employed social workers to assess foster carers and to provide extra social work support when necessary. Foster carers are confident that they get a good service from all. There is no formal staff learning and development programme. New staff do not have a proper induction or supervision. Their professional development and support does not yet have the focus that the agency gives to foster carers.

There are the green shoots of a new spirit of leadership in the agency. The fostering provider and its wider organisation have the advantage of a national reach and centralised functions for contracting arrangements, learning and development and human resources and placements. They have the ability to marshal the resources to secure 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. Inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.