

Hillcrest Care Ltd - Orange Grove Fostercare

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| Inspector | Suzanne Young |
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure 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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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|---------------|---|
| Outstanding: | this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality |
| Good: | this aspect of the provision is strong |
| Satisfactory: | this aspect of the provision is sound |
| Inadequate: | this aspect of the provision is not good enough |

Service information

Brief description of the service

Orange Grove Fostercare operates as an independent fostering agency as part of Hillcrest Care Ltd. The parent company is based in Hampshire and the Orange Grove Fostercare head office is based in Malvern, Worcestershire. Orange Grove Fostercare operates registered fostering services across England.

The registered setting in Malvern (Orange Grove) provides services in the Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Birmingham regions. The service was first registered in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000 on 6 November 2008. It operates with its own registered manager and fostering team.

At the time of the inspection the service supports 26 fostering households who care for 34 children and young people.

Summary

During this full inspection which was announced, all key standards were inspected. The inspection focussed on arrangements to meet children and young people's individual needs, to safeguard children and young people's welfare, and to enable children and young people to participate effectively in their day-to-day care.

Orange Grove is judged as good overall with good outcomes being achieved in all the outcome areas. Foster carers are providing good support to children and young people to help them remain healthy, stay safe, develop self-esteem and achieve their potential. Foster carers receive regular supervision and good quality training.

The agency has some minor shortfalls in relation to policies and procedures, records and matching documentation which do not fully underpin the work of the service. Actions and recommendations have been made in these areas.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has taken action to comply with the majority of requirements identified at the last inspection. A comprehensive quality assurance system has been developed which evaluates and promotes the care provided to children. This includes monitoring the health and education attainment of children placed with foster parents. Children and young people placed with the agency have risk assessments completed by the local authority on placement or by the agency shortly following a placement being made. Each foster carer's case record now includes a record of placements made including the circumstances of the termination of the placements.

Foster placement agreements are still not routinely completed and in place at the point of placement. This action will be remade.

Recommendations relating to the composition of the fostering panel, risk assessments for contact and assessment of prospective foster carers have all been complied with. Gaps in matching are still not being satisfactorily identified and compensated for on matching documents.

and the level of record keeping by staff and carers remain variable. These recommendations have been re-made.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency has developed practice which delivers good health outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people receive health care which meets their needs for physical, emotional and social development and which are identified and met through appropriate matching with foster carers. Arrangements for medical consent are clear at the outset of the placement and necessary health information is acquired at the point of referral.

Foster carers ensure children are able to receive the medical care and attention they require by registering them with doctors, dentists and opticians. Specialised health services are sought for children and young people when this is required. The agency employs a child psychologist to work with foster carers to support children in placement. This helps to ensure all children and young people have access to the appropriate medical and health services they require to support their individual health needs.

The agency has introduced a health record for children and young people which they complete with their foster carer. This provides a comprehensive record of all health interventions which support consistent health work with children and young people. Health care matters are discussed and recorded during foster carers' supervision sessions and in foster carers recording.

Foster carers are required to attend first aid training and receive comprehensive training to help them promote children and young people's physical, mental, sexual and emotional wellbeing.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency has developed systems which help to ensure children and young people are kept safe. The agency has a range of child protection and safe-caring policies in place to safeguard children. Detailed safe-caring policies are in place and reviewed on the placement of a child or young person. Risk assessments are also completed which help to safeguard children within their placements and ensure the individual needs of every child is considered. The child protection policy however does not include the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect should the concerns be about the agency or senior management of the agency. This could compromise children's safety.

Practices in recruitment and staff vetting help ensure the appropriate recruitment and vetting of staff, foster carers and panel members. It is not however always clear from the personnel files whether written references have been followed up by telephone calls for all staff employed by the agency. The Registered Manager has the required experience to manage a regulated service and is competent and well motivated.

Children and young people are well matched with their foster carers who enable their overall needs to be met and ensure positive outcomes for children. Placing children and young people with the right foster carers increases the likelihood of good outcomes in education, health, participation and safeguarding. This process however is not supported by good quality matching documents. References to elements of matching and identifying areas where foster carers need

additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carers are not evidenced. This is particularly evident in matching children in trans-racial placements.

Foster placement agreements are in place for all children and young people along with other placement planning information. These however are not always being completed prior to or at the time of placements being made. This could leave foster carers without the full support they need to understand their role and responsibilities in relation to each child placed.

Foster carers' homes are comfortable and provide a safe and healthy environment for children and young people. The agency undertakes comprehensive health and safety checks and has instigated a regime where unannounced visits are carried out by another member of staff or by the manager rather than the foster carers' supervising social worker. This ensures independent oversight and reduces the likelihood of unconscious collusion by the supervising social worker.

The agency has a comprehensive range of safeguarding and behaviour management training available to staff and foster carers which is part of their core training and is regularly updated. This further promotes the safety of children and young people.

The fostering panels have recently been reorganised and the agency now operates its own fostering panel. The fostering panel fulfils its functions and duties in line with its overall objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people. The panel minutes demonstrate that a comprehensive quality assurance function is being provided by the panel and evidences that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers. Panel members receive an induction and additional training which means they are fully informed and updated on relevant topics and issues. The panel receives management information about the fostering service and panel business. This provides an overview of the service provision and insight into the needs of the children being placed. The agency has successfully recruited a new member who has previously been fostered or had a child fostered.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Staff and foster carers have a good awareness of equality and diversity and are aware of the importance of promoting individual needs within the foster placement. The agency recruits foster carers that can meet the diversity needs of the children placed and who are able to support and reflect their identities. This however is not well supported in matching documents which do not always clearly outline the measures put in place to meet the needs of children and young people placed in trans-racial placements.

There is an equal opportunities policy in place and policies procedures and guidance throughout, address diversity and equality in respect of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. The agency provides training in diversity and equality for all staff, foster carers and panel members. This contributes to a raised awareness and a common understanding of the issues. Equality and diversity is also addressed through the assessment and training of foster carers and during their supervision.

The agency actively supports carers in helping children practice and celebrate their religion. Foster carers are also supported to help unaccompanied asylum seeking minors to build links within their own communities. Foster carers can access interpreters and translators for children and young people who do not speak or understand English if needed.

Foster carers support children and young people to access a wide range of groups and activities to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence.

The agency gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and actively promotes children's education to maximise their potential with good outcomes for children and young people being achieved. All children currently have a school or educational placement.

Foster carers are knowledgeable and supportive of children's education and are proud of their achievements. They attend education meetings and are proactive in putting in place strategies to support children and young people. They assist children and young people with homework and facilities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency encourages children and young people to promote and support family contacts. Guidance is available for foster carers and arrangements for contact is considered during referral and matching. This is recorded in the foster placement agreement. The importance of maintaining positive contact with birth family and friends is discussed during the assessment process of foster carers and through the pre-approval training.

Foster carers encourage children and young people to build relationships with their families which is supported by the agency. This contributes to the development of emotional stability in children and young people. Unaccompanied asylum seeking minors are supported to keep in contact with friends from similar cultures and are able to access news and information from their home countries. Foster carers record information on the impact of contact and discuss issues relating to contact in supervision sessions.

Young people are actively encouraged to express their views regarding their care and the service through a wide range of opportunities. The agency provides newsletters for children and young people. Some young people have been able to attend a national conference set up by the agency to speak with staff and carers. Young people can also get involved with foster carers pre-approval training talking to prospective carers about their experiences on being looked-after. The agency complete an annual review of the quality of care when young people are asked for their comments on a range of service issues. Results of these reviews are fed back to the team when required for action to improve quality of care. Looked after children and birth children are also formally consulted during foster carers' annual reviews through questionnaires and during various social events. This empowers young people to have confidence to contribute their views in a range of social situations and in decision making in their daily lives.

Young people are made aware of how to access the complaints procedure. The agency operates a helpline for foster children with an independent person. All children get a leaflet and foster carers are tasked with ensuring children are aware of this service. While the majority of young people are aware of this none have chosen to use the service.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are supported by foster carers in developing the necessary skills so that they are able to move successfully into independence. Foster carers encourage and support young people to develop skills to manage their domestic life, money, education and employment and to develop social skills. The agency supports this through supervision and through clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independence.

The agency has developed a workbook for carers to work through with young people to record the skills attained for independence. Although this has specific value when working with teenagers the agency promotes its application for children and young people of all ages. Training is also provided to foster carers in developing independence living skills.

Foster carers work with local authorities to support the development of the pathway plan and help young people to understand what it means.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The organisation of the fostering service supports good outcomes for children and young people. The agency has developed sound management and organisational practices to support the fostering task. It is organised in a way which delivers an effective service to children, young people and foster carers.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Individual needs and diversity issues are addressed in a wide range of training for staff and foster carers that raise awareness and provide skills and strategies to challenge oppressive practice and attitudes. The agency assesses the capacity of potential foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people with diverse needs and ensures that all children and young people are equally able to participate and achieve their potential.

Staff, foster carers and young people are able to understand the aims and objectives of the agency through a clear statement of purpose, staff and carers' handbooks and children's guide. There are good policies and procedures in place to support the roles of foster carers and staff.

The agency has comprehensive quality assurance systems to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of care provided to children and young people. This helps ensure the quality of service to children and young people continue to develop and improve. There are a range of effective methods for obtaining the views of foster carers and young people including conferences, reviews and an annual review of the quality of care.

Hillcrest Care recently achieved the investors in people award. Foster carers feel well supported from the agency which in turn enables them to effectively support the children and young people who are placed with them. A good system of appropriate supervision and support is in place for staff and carers. Foster care agreements however do not state the terms of the foster carers' approval as required by regulation.

The staff team are competent and well-supported by the manager. Although fluctuations within the staff team have continued since the last inspection recent months has seen stability and the staff team is now running with no vacancies. Recent growth has led the agency to develop

a new social worker post. The agency has clear lines of accountability which is known to staff and foster carers.

The agency provides a very good standard of training for staff and foster carers which increases their ability to work effectively with children and young people who are fostered. There is a comprehensive training programme in place alongside the delivery of the Children's Workforce Development Council's training standards for foster carers

Assessments of foster carers are detailed and robust. They are completed to a good standard and test the required qualities, competences and aptitudes of the prospective foster carers. Assessments of prospective foster carers are usually completed by external assessors although staff are able to retain their skills in this area by completing assessments of respite carers. All annual reviews of foster carers are completed within the required 12 month period which ensures the continued suitability of the foster carer.

The agency's administrative records are adequate to meet the needs of the service and records support the work undertaken. Up-to-date, comprehensive case records are maintained for each foster carer and child in foster care however the level of record keeping by both staff and foster carers is variable. Storage of information and information pertaining to young people is also being stored inappropriately on foster carers' files.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

| Standard | Action | Due date |
|----------|---|------------------|
| 8 | ensure before making a placement, the responsible authority enters into a written agreement (the "foster placement agreement") with the foster parent relating to the child, which covers all the matters specified in Schedule 6 (Regulation 34(3)) | 31 December 2009 |
| 22 | ensure the foster care agreement covers all matters specified in Schedule 5 (Regulation 28 95)(b) | 31 December 2009 |
| 9 | ensure the child protection policy sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect. This refers to the procedures to take should the concerns be about the agency or senior management of the agency. (Regulation 12(1)(b)) | 31 December 2009 |

Recommendations

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

- ensure reference is made to elements of matching when agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carers. This relates in particular to trans-racial placements (NMS 8.4)
- ensure telephone enquires are made for all people working for the fostering agency as well as obtaining written references (NMS 15.3)
- ensure separate records are kept for foster carers and children (NMS 25.2)
- ensure there is a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records and remedial action is taken when necessary. (NMS 25.3)