

# Hillcrest Care Ltd - Orange Grove Fostercare

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC383805
<b>Inspection date</b>	31/01/2013
<b>Inspector</b>	Christy Wannop
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	Domestic adoption

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Orange Grove House, Upper Interfields, MALVERN, Worcestershire, WR14 1UT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01886 833860
<b>Email</b>	enquiries@theorangegrove.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Hillcrest Care Ltd.
<b>Registered manager</b>	Sarah Anne Meadowcroft
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Anthony Raymond Myers
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	09/12/2009

---

© Crown copyright 2013

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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

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 and is known locally as 'Three Counties.'

The service has currently 34 approved foster households, and is currently supporting 52 children in 23 foster homes.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

Outcomes for children and young people are good. Placing authorities nationally are overwhelmingly positive that the organisation's foster carers give children help to progress in education, health and in their personal development. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and children are safe. Placing authorities are confident about this. A large majority of stakeholders think the services that the organisation's nationwide services are good or excellent and would recommend the organisation.

The quality of foster parent assessments, training and support is good. Foster carers report a rigorous process: 'They know all about us.' The agency has strengthened systems for linking children to the right foster placement with the aim of improving placement stability. They consult well with children, parents and others; involving foster families and foster children in the life of the agency through training opportunities, gatherings, trips and forums to share views and skills. Children know that the agency takes their views seriously and involves them in service development. They say they feel they are living with the right foster families; they are very positive about their relationships with their foster parents.

The organisation has clear leadership and is thoughtful about how to improve positive outcomes for children. There is a systematic national approach to quality review to assist this. There are, however, some shortfalls. Points for improvement are: how the agency evaluates and reports about the quality of care locally; how they give information about foster carers to children, and how they ensure they always have, and share, the most effective information about children's placement needs.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that children's health is promoted in accordance with their placement plan, particularly in respect of accurate administration of prescribed medication and knowledge of children's health needs (NMS 6.5)
- ensure that, unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and 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)
- give the foster carer (including respite foster carers) all the information they need about the child to provide appropriate care and make sure this information is kept up to date. This information must always include the child's up-to-date care plan which has been given to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the 2010 Regulations, and the placement plan, including information regarding arrangements for consent to medical treatment. Information should be supplied in advance or within a maximum of five working days (Volume 4, statutory guidance, para 3.6)
- ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends, this with specific reference to evaluation of information and data within regulation 35 and Schedule 6 monitoring. (NMS 25.2)

### Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Children live in safe and suitable, comfortable foster homes and the overwhelming majority of placing authorities say that children become absolutely part of the organisation's fostering families. One child said, 'It's good, better than OK.' Children are involved in decisions about care and say they are satisfied with the way the

agency resolves any complaints they make about their experiences. They have foster carers who meet their different and diverse needs and additional support is organised where there are gaps. Children can have halal food, learn about their religion and people respect their backgrounds, even where they do not live with a foster family that matches their specific identity. Placing authorities say the organisation's foster carers help children to understand their situation and history. However, while placing authorities get good clear information about foster placements, children rarely have a photo or information about new foster homes to help them begin to make a positive attachment before they arrive.

The majority of foster placements do not end unexpectedly; children have extra support when their situations change and if disruption looks likely. Many children find long lasting placements with their brothers and sisters in larger foster families. Some local authorities have requested other siblings return to specific foster families when a return to birth family has not succeeded.

Children follow active, healthy lifestyles and take up hobbies like horse-riding, football, skateboarding, performing arts and gymnastics. Children unanimously say they eat healthily. The few children who do smoke and drink when they begin their placements, get help to stop. Children have opportunities they would not otherwise have had. One foster carer described one child's transformation, 'She has blossomed, walks with her head straight.' Every child has a family holiday with its foster carers and some have had life changing experiences. Children are doing increasingly well in education. They get individual home tuition to catch up with their peers and say this really helps. They get good help with homework and school attendance improves, for one child dramatically, from 40% to 100% attendance.

Placing authorities say children get consistently good support to keep in touch with their family of origin. Parents get a positive welcome from foster families, where this is part of the child's plan; children get help with difficult feelings caused by separation. They see the people they need to see and some say that they appreciate making new and different relationships and like having a new life in foster care.

Care promotes children's independence at all stages of their life. This focuses on enhancing skills from an early age to develop resilience and self-confidence. Some children talked about wanting to stay with their carers until they are adults. The large majority of foster carers nationally feel the organisation helps them to help children through this stage in their lives. Young people who move on to independent young adulthood often keep in touch with carers, demonstrating the impact of some of these relationships.

## Quality of service

The quality of the service is **good**.

The organisation is continually improving recruitment, preparation, training, assessment, support and supervision of foster carers through centralised national systems for advertising and initial enquiries. A new placements team provides a

national point of coordination about children's placement needs. The vast majority of foster carers felt the agency managed their initial enquiry efficiently and promptly and they felt welcomed and that their assessment was comprehensive. They feel justified in having chosen to foster for this agency and feel well rewarded through the wide range of training and excellent support by the agency's skilled fostering and family support social workers. They feel that the organisation gives them respect and also a challenge to improve their care through annual reviews.

The fostering panel is very effective. Skilled panel members ensure that they only recommend the right people as foster parents and that assessments carried out, largely by self-employed assessors, are robust and focus on the needs of children. Placing authorities are very positive about matching children to families and about the level of support to carers. One recognised the inevitability that some placements do not work, even after, 'a comprehensive matching process'. Another commented on how children had found stability where they had previously been unable to put down roots.

Foster carers overwhelmingly say that feel confident that they know which decisions they can make and the level of their authority. However, foster carers do not always have the very best information about the children who come to live with them and this makes children harder to care for. Only 50% of children have a placing authority care or placement plan. The agency fills this gap by maximising referral information prior to placement, requesting local authority essential information and by creating extensive 'in house' placement plans. However, there have also been occasions when the agency has not ensured the quality of the 'in house' information about children's care needs, or provided the placement plan when children move between their own permanent and respite foster carers. For example, the agency has not made sure foster carers have sufficient information and understanding about children's health conditions or prescription medication and, consequently, children have not had the care they needed.

The agency promotes children's rights and supports them to have their voice heard. One placing authority commented that, 'Foster carers work well to involve children.' Children talked positively about how their foster carers worked with advocates to support their complaints. Some foster carers have developed additional skills and expertise in communication with children who have autism or difficulty in understanding everyday concepts like time. They use a range of communication tools to help children understand using picture and symbol charts and adapted sign language.

Foster carers have training and support to provide positive care and to value children's individuality. They do not resort to authoritarian responses, but talk to children and try to counter negative attitudes towards women and girls and explain why racist language is offensive. In time of stress or crisis, the agency provides additional support from a therapeutic social worker and the family support worker. They work directly with children or with foster carers, who say this reflective input is really helpful in giving insight and also a pause to let them, 'recharge their batteries'.

The agency has additionally strengthened its provision through an educational advisor who works on behalf of individual children. Thus foster carers have increased skills and knowledge about how to best support children's educational attainment. Foster carers and placing authorities say this has been enormously helpful. They make the link between good educational experience and outcomes and secure, stable placements. A very high proportion of foster carers have achieved the nationally accredited foster care qualification. Placing authorities also comment positively on the skills of foster carers supporting parent and child placements. They say they are: 'Very happy with the quality of service offered by both the agency and also the expertise demonstrated by the foster carers in supporting a young and vulnerable mother to learn the skills needed to care for her child, and also in learning independent skills.'

There is responsive, creative support to foster carers, individually and in carer forums. The agency recognises the separate and special needs of each member of the foster family in the success of foster placements. One carer said, 'Orange Grove has been very good in that they give separate days out for carers own children so that they can relax enjoy and be understood by others. Our children also get a chance to be seen privately and individually at home.' The vast majority of foster carers feel that they work as part of a team. They are very satisfied with the support they get, and say their fostering social workers maximise contact by text, email, telephone, in person and are available to help them to help children. One foster carer said, 'My supervising social worker has always been available and supported us as a family so we meet the needs of each child placed with us.'

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The agency safeguards children's welfare. Child protection has a high priority and the manager refers any concerns about children's welfare to placing authorities or to the Local Authority Designated Officer. The agency concludes any allegations or investigations properly after advice from the safeguarding team and foster carers are clear about the outcome of investigations. A very large majority of placing authorities are very confident that the fostering service understands child protection and safeguarding and deals well with any disclosures. The manager notifies all parties about significant incidents and a recent peak in significant incidents is currently under management review to establish learning points.

The agency promotes children's involvement in their safe care. Where possible, foster carers draw up plans with children, so that they understand the risks in everyday family life and develop skills in keeping themselves safe. Consequently, children say they feel secure and that foster carers are supportive about any bullying they face and help to keep them safe online. Children have good information about help-lines and advocates and the organisation provides a telephone number to raise children's rights issues directly with the organisation. Foster carers are alert to issues of abuse or neglect from children's past lives and tailor their care accordingly. Foster carers know when children need space and privacy and even how a tone of voice can

affect a child and trigger an unhappy response. Children do not go missing from care often, but when they do, foster carers work with protective agencies to find them, and to understand the reasons for children's unhappiness to prevent it happening again. Placing authorities are positive about the way the organisation works nationally to respond when children go missing from their foster homes.

Recruitment and vetting procedures are robust and ensure that people working for the agency pose no risk to children. The Registered Manager plans to complete safer recruitment training to reinforce her skills in this area. Children live in safe environments because the agency makes regular unannounced checks on foster homes. They ensure each child has a risk assessment, that health and safety checks are complete and the manager monitors any accidents to reduce future occurrence. These good arrangements keep children safe and sound, through effective policy, procedure and practice in all areas of their lives and the agency's functions.

## **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **adequate**.

This service has maintained good outcomes for children, strengthened consistency across its national provision with key appointments of new staff in quality assurance, to promote better educational outcomes and has improved management of referrals and the placement matching process. There are established systems for governance and regional and national managers assist the Registered Manager in a supportive professional framework. Placing authorities are very positive about the experiences of the children with the organisation nationally.

Leaders and managers understand and achieve regulatory compliance and have rectified previous regulatory and national minimum shortfalls. Recruitment and vetting processes are now fully robust, foster carer agreements now state the terms of approval. Matching documentation has improved. There is an updated child protection policy that provides sound guidance for staff. There is now a comprehensive audit system to ensure consistently good quality electronic record keeping about children and their foster carers. These improvements mean that the agency is better able to deliver an effective service to children so they are safer.

The organisation has increasingly sophisticated national data systems for monitoring and reporting on the quality of care and improving outcomes for children across all registered offices. Systems for organisational scrutiny of the Registered Manager's local monitoring are developing. The regulation 34 review of the quality of care submitted to Ofsted lacks evaluative reflection about data and differs from a similarly titled 'in house' document. While the Registered Manager monitors all matters and properly addresses any concerns as they occur, the report of regular managerial monitoring uses confused information and unreliable data and does not identify concerns about specific incidents, patterns and trends over a consistent period.

The agency fulfils its corporate parenting responsibilities and works with a range of



fellow professionals, foster carers, parents, and children in partnership. One placing authority commented that despite a turbulent placement, 'yet with the support, interaction and commitment from all involved, it is a privilege to see X determined to become a success in life.' However, although the agency follows up on requests for legally required care and placement plans, it has struggled to obtain even half of this essential information from placing authorities.

Placing authorities say the organisation nationally has a clear priority about improving outcomes for children; one described them as professional and caring in their approach. Placing authorities, foster carers and children feel consulted about, and included in, the agency's work. They have contributed to the foster carer's charter, to the annual review of the quality of care and individually to the development of children's in-house placement plans.

There is a small, stable team, well qualified and trained for the work they do and with a good work ethic and child focus. They reflect and talk about placement breakdowns, complaints, and allegations to plan effectively for professional learning and development and to make sure that care improves. Support to social work, support and administrative staff is good. Foster carers have a high level of confidence and satisfaction with the agency and share the sense of personal responsibility for the children in their care. They appreciate intelligent, responsive fostering social workers, one described them as, 'Down to earth, realistic and gives tremendous support.'

## **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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

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 independent fostering agencies.