

Orange Grove Fostercare (South Coast Office)

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC485748
Inspection date	1 February 2016
Inspector	Mr James Harmon
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

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Date of last inspection	N/A

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Orange Grove Fostercare South Coast Office is a privately run independent fostering agency (IFA), originally registered with Ofsted in December 2011 as Orange Grove Fostercare. The organisation re-registered as Orange Grove Fostercare South Coast Office in December 2015, after being purchased by Hillcrest Care Ltd in 2009. In July 2014 it was integrated into Partnership in Children's Services (PiCS) and demerged from Hillcrest. The agency is based in Burgess Hill, West Sussex within the South East region and covers Kent, West Sussex, East Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire.

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**

The agency has made considerable strides in improving the service since the last inspection. The new management team has been in post for over a year now. They are intent on moving the agency in the right direction by providing safe placements. There is currently a group of stable placements for children and young people on the register. While recruitment has been slow, due to the great effort put forth by management to improve the agency, there are plans to start actively recruiting new carers in the near future.

Children and young people are the primary focus of the agency. Extensive support and training are provided to carers, ensuring that they effectively meet the needs of the children and young people placed with them. The supervising social workers and

family support workers are all competent in their duties. Some are experienced foster carers with specific skills relating to children in foster care. Carers appreciate the supervising social workers being able to relate directly to their challenges and experiences.

The recruitment of carers is of good quality. An experienced independent social worker completes carers' assessments. The panel makes sound judgments that support children and young people. Potential carers understand the expectations placed upon them by approval and then learn to understand the ethos of the agency, according to the statement of purpose.

The agency makes no breaches of regulations that could have a negative impact on the children and young people placed with the service. All previous recommendations have been fulfilled. All discussions during the inspection were well received by the management and viewed as an opportunity to improve the service.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Fostering panels should have access to medical expertise and legal advice, as required (NMS 14.6).
- Entries in records, decisions and reasons, should be legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising and distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information, and are signed and dated (NMS 26.5).

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people are matched with approved carers that can meet their needs. A child-friendly carer profile, tailored to the age of the child or young person, is made available in advance. This information provides them with details of their placement and what to expect from their carers. The process allows children and young people to settle quickly. A placing social worker summarised the positive experience of a young mother before being placed with her child: 'The young person had her anxiety eased by meeting with the carer before being placed. She was able to attend a meeting with the carer and after the meeting felt relieved about going into placement.'

All care plans for children and young people are individualised, reflecting their goals. They feel safe and develop quality attachments to their carers. A young person who potentially may stay long-term in his placement said, 'I like everything about my placement. I call my foster carers mom and dad because I feel like I am at home.' Some young people are able to remain with their carers past their 18th birthday, classifying the placement as 'staying put'. This type of placement is only possible when a sound relationship exists with their carer and significant progress has been made.

'The agency works well with complex cases,' according to a placing authority. This is proven by the agency's ability to manage children and young people that have behavioural difficulties, cultural differences and lack the ability to understand the English language. These placements were evidenced to be stable, allowing reasonable progress.

Children and young people placed with the agency are of the opinion that their wishes and feelings are extremely important. They know how to complain while being encouraged to speak freely, so their views can be incorporated into their day-to-day routines. A consultation day was held for the children and young people. The agenda consisted of some fun activities, then covered the following topics: knowing how to complain, who to complain to and how the agency should consult with them.

Local authority health assessments are routinely undertaken in a timely manner, contributing to children and young people leading healthy lives. They are promptly registered with all health agencies and have regular appointments. Participation in activities such as swimming benefit and aid in keeping children and young people healthy.

Educationally, children and young people make good progress. Those that historically did not attend school now attend regularly and have improved academically. Some children and young people are in the process of preparing for their GCSEs. It is predicted that they will perform well. The educational support worker continues to track their progress and is available to offer support with personal educational plans, and any other support needed.

Children and young people are accepted as extended members of their foster carers' families. They enjoy being accepted and treated as individuals and not as children in care. They attend functions and outings with their carers, providing them with a renewed outlook on family dynamics. They make and sustain appropriate friendships at school and in the community. A foster carer said that a young person has 'developed solid social skills and is well liked at school and has plenty of friends'.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

There are wide ranges of stable placements due to the successful recruitment of committed and skilled foster carers. They can meet the diverse needs of children and young people such as unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, those with disabilities and those with children. These particular placements require specialist training and support when compared with traditional placements.

The foster carers actively contribute to the care of children and young people. They are proactively involved in their day-to-day planning. Care plans reflect the views of the children and young people. The carers engage with the placing and supervising social worker while keeping detailed monthly summaries.

The training and support provided to the foster carers by the agency is exceptional. According to carers, training has improved significantly in the past year. The training and supervision that are provided are purposeful and focused on the carers' abilities to keep children and young people safe while managing their needs. A carer provided high praise of the agency saying, 'My personal opinion of the agency is they deal with things fast and efficient. The amount of support available is fantastic. You know you can call the agency 24 hours and always reach someone.' The carers that have been with the agency for more than one year have all achieved the support and development standard.

Foster carers undertook unaccompanied minor training during the inspection. Some called the course 'incredible'. The trainer was an experienced foster carer from another organisation who had successfully cared for an asylum seeking minor. The young person was included in the training, making the course a real experience for the carers.

Carers who were classified as parent and child placements under the previous manager were required to undertake a specialist two-day training refresher. If this training was not undertaken, then no further parent and child placements could be placed until this had been completed. Future carers must have one year of experience before applying to accommodate a parent and child. A new policy was put in place in January 2016 as a way of acknowledging the difficulty in a carer managing such placements.

Carers feel valued by the agency. They provided several examples of how the agency

had shown its appreciation. Staff had personally dropped off hampers during the Christmas holiday, provided a Christmas party and a group dinner and activities for their biological children.

The agency panel is an effective gatekeeping mechanism, committed to safe and reliable placements for children and young people. A joint panel has been formed with the London and Essex office for Orange Grove Fostercare. The panel consists of professionals mostly in social work and education. The chair is experienced and competent and ensures that information is scrutinised and followed up if needed. The agency decision maker reviews the performance of the chair annually. The agency is in the process of adding a professional with a background in law enforcement. It would also benefit from the recruitment of a professional with health experience.

The agency has established some good relationships with placing authorities with the understanding that certain information is needed to successfully place children and young people. Required information consists of age and background, along with any complex needs, as only a certain number of specialised carers are available. When information is not available, the placement will not proceed preventing placements from being made which might easily disrupt. The placing officer has not had to decline any placements since coming into post in May 2015.

Records evidenced the most recent review by the local authority, detailing the progress of the children and young people. The supervising social worker and foster carers attend all review meetings. Everyone involved contributes and offers a view of the placement. A placing social worker spoke these kind words about the agency impact on a young person, 'They have contributed well to meetings and have worked positively with the local authority to reach desired outcomes for my young people.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Safeguarding of children and young people is a top priority of the agency. The children and young people feel safe and the individual risks associated with them are known to all involved in their care. As risks are identified they are incorporated into the detailed risk assessments already in place. Professionals were very confident in the policies and procedures put in place by the agency that maintain the safety of children and young people.

There is a rigorous response for children and young people that go missing from care and are at risk of child sexual exploitation. Appropriate support and protocols are activated to combat these risks. The challenging behaviours that are displayed during this time by children and young people are managed well by foster carers, with the support of the agency. A placing social worker complimented the agency, 'Thus far they are supporting the foster carers with managing my young person's challenging behaviour whilst liaising with me in an open manner to ensure effective information sharing.' An updated child sexual risk assessment had been completed for a young

person but, despite prompting by management, this was not available on the young person's file. This practice issue was addressed during the inspection and the young person's file was updated.

There was evidence of a recent, exceptional response by the agency for a young person at risk of radicalisation. The process started with the foster carer appropriately identifying and reporting the concerns for the young person. The agency responded by having their head trainer provide prompt one-to-one training to the foster carer, providing them with the skills and awareness to safeguard the young person and minimise risk. A high level of cooperation with the local authority and the police by the agency continues to take place.

Allegations against foster carers are treated as serious and handled with extreme care by the agency. A foster carer said, 'The staff were very forthcoming and dealt with the matter with sensitivity and consideration to the young person and myself. I understood why certain actions had to be taken and didn't feel judged.' The allegation was unfounded. The robust response and support provided by the agency allowed the placement to continue safely with minimum impact on the relationship between the carer and the young person. The placing social worker expressed that she was very happy with the way that the agency had protected the young person while looking into the matter.

Foster carers are confident that they understand the risks associated with the children and young people in their care. They were able to discuss the actions undertaken in an array of safeguarding incidents. A foster carer said, 'I was able to refer to my training to prevent a young person from having their rights violated.'

'They have kept me informed of significant incidents whilst maintaining confidentiality and following due process.' These are the words of a placing social worker. The statement exemplifies the ability of the agency to establish productive relationships with all agencies involved in the protection of children and young people.

The agency is privileged to have a thorough human resources department that meticulously manages the safe recruitment of all new staff. References are double-checked and a clear Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is in place before any offer of employment is made. The detailed process ensures that all people who work with children and young people are safe and appropriate.

The monitoring of significant events by the leadership and management contributes greatly to the judgement of outstanding. All incidents are monitored, ensuring that they are followed up with management insight to prevent any drift. All notifications and updates are provided to Ofsted in a timely manner and discussed directly when needed.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: Good

The new leadership and management have done a tremendous job of improving the agency over the past year. The registered manager has a wealth of knowledge, with experience in managing children and young people with complex needs. The team manager compliments him with a well-organised approach to managing the staff team, ensuring that children and young people placements are managed well.

The management has developed strong relationships with the local placing authorities. A placing authority commissioner believes that the management is a strength of the agency. She highlights that the agency has consistently moved forward in the past year, and that the local authority has renewed its block contract with the agency while paying quarterly in advance, soon to be annually.

The agency is working closely with a local authority to develop an apprenticeship programme for young people in the future. This will provide them with an opportunity to work closely with the agency, putting their experience of foster care to use. The apprenticeship will allow them to take life chances as part of social values.

The managers effectively start to track the progress of children and young people six weeks after they are placed. They apply the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters initiative, identifying where additional support is needed. Experiences of children and young people have improved due to the active management involvement.

An additional strength of the monitoring process is the effective use of systems to ensure compliance with agency policies. Managers successfully identify risks and assess gaps in the agency. Foster carers, children and young people are sufficiently involved in the development of the service, providing an important perspective when reviewing the service in its entirety. Quality and performance information is promptly submitted to Ofsted annually.

All agency staff are suitably qualified, supervised and have their performance appraised annually. The staff believe that they are a good team with excellent support and training. They view changes in the agency over the past year as positive and consistent. Social worker practice meetings are held separately from team meetings to review their practice and ideas about managing stress.

The previous recommendation of the last inspection has been complied with and an out of hours rota is now in place, allowing carers to call one number to have access to the social worker on duty and then a manager.

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, 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.