

Orange Grove Fostercare Northwest

Orange Grove Fostercare Limited

North West Office, Walnut Tree Business Centre, Suite 3, Northwich Road, Lower Stretton, Warrington WA4 4PG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Orange Grove Fostercare Northwest is an independent fostering agency. It was registered with Ofsted on 24 February 2015 and is based in Lower Stretton, Warrington. The agency is part of Orange Grove Fostercare, an independent fostering provider with six registered offices across the country.

On 10 October 2022, 56 children were placed with the agency and there were 40 approved fostering households.

The agency offers emergency, short-term, long-term, permanent and respite placements.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 October 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 4 March 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children experience an excellent quality of warm and nurturing care that enables them to settle quickly and establish healthy routines. Some children have spent a major part of their lives with the same foster carers. This enables children to enjoy stable relationships that significantly enhance their life chances.

Children spoken to by inspectors had a strong sense of belonging. Children saw themselves as part of a family. They expected to stay with their foster families as they moved into adulthood. These lifelong links provide children with strong and secure relationships that help them move forward with their lives with confidence.

Children are supported to move into foster homes in a planned way. Matching is robust. The registered manager works with the agency's central referral team to ensure that the agency has a good understanding of the child's needs prior to approaching the foster carer about the potential placement. This means that the decision to place a child is made on sound and up-to-date information. Consequently, placement stability is strong.

One child has successfully made the transition from residential care to her foster family. The matching of the carer and child was afforded a great amount of time and attention. Planning for this transition was highly detailed and sensitive to the needs of both the child and the foster carer. It took many months to plan this transition and ensure that services were in place to meet both their needs. The agency advocated well for the placement to be fully supported with additional therapeutic input. The child and the foster carers received excellent support and advice which has helped them develop a trusting and secure relationship. This offers the child the opportunity to enjoy a family life.

In the small number of cases where children do leave their foster families in an unplanned manner, the registered manager and the referral team discuss the learning from this in regular meetings. This learning is then used to inform future decision-making and ensure foster carers and children receive the right support to enable them to live together successfully.

Children are encouraged to develop their skills and interests through involvement in a range of hobbies and activities. Foster carers are extremely sensitive to encouraging siblings who are placed together to develop as individuals and nurture their emotional needs and identities. This is carefully promoted through offering individual time and fun activities.

Where appropriate, foster carers can access the specialist knowledge of the agency's education and clinical psychology staff. Access to this professional expertise gives carers the additional knowledge and insight they need to advocate for the children in their care and ensure their emotional and learning needs are met. Staff advocate on

behalf of children with placing authorities to gain funding for additional therapeutic input for children where this is assessed as required.

Children and foster carers have been well supported through periods of national and local restrictions. The agency has been flexible in their approach to maintaining contact and providing visits. This has ensured that children are safeguarded and foster carers feel supported and valued.

Children are supported and encouraged to maintain relationships with their birth families. A child said, 'My mum can be difficult sometimes, but my foster carer understands why she is like this. My foster carer supports her, and she supports me. This is really important to me because she is still my mum.'

The staff demonstrate a real commitment to children and foster carers. As a small, stable team, they know children and carers well and have well-established and positive relationships. Foster carers responding to a request for written feedback during inspection were, without exception, extremely positive about the agency. Foster carers said of the agency:

- 'The staff were outstanding in their support for me and my foster child during a very difficult time. They went above and beyond.'
- 'Over the years, I have been supported not only by my social worker but by every member of the team. Someone from the team is always available and knows my child.'
- 'If it wasn't for the support I got as a new foster carer at the start of the pandemic, I might have given up.'
- 'The agency are enhancing children's lives, and I hope to continue to support my child until she reaches adulthood. I will then continue to support her with whatever decision she makes regarding her future.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The safeguarding culture across the agency, for the most part, supports foster carers to understand children's vulnerabilities and keep them safe.

Children are regularly seen by supervising social workers, and unannounced visits take place in line with regulations. Additional unannounced visits are undertaken by a family support worker. However, these visits by an unqualified worker are not recorded in such a way that they are differentiated from the visits of the supervising social workers.

Staff do not always ensure that relevant statutory documentation is obtained from placing authorities or that carer's practice is supported by comprehensive written risk assessments. The quality of risk assessments is variable. One child with high risks in relation to exploitation was not assessed as such.

The same child has experienced inappropriate and potentially emotionally harmful behaviour, through the use of harmful language, from a foster carer. The agency response to this has not been robust. The child has not been spoken to about their experience of these behaviours. As a result, staff do not know what the child's views are of continuing to live within this foster family. These omissions had not been identified by leaders and managers.

Incidents of children going missing from home are low. Where this does happen, foster carers are proactive in following children's missing-from-home plans. They inform all relevant professionals in a timely manner and use their knowledge of their child and the child's friendship networks to bring the child home safely.

On one occasion, a foster carer did not inform the out-of-hours service that a child in their care had said the foster carer had hurt them. This was shared with the supervising social worker the following day. Staff then swiftly shared this information with the child's social worker and it was addressed in the foster carer's supervision by the supervising social worker. The agency did not follow this up with the placing authority by ensuring the child's social worker had spoken with the child about the incident to ensure that their views were obtained and to satisfy themselves the child was safeguarded.

Foster carers have the skills to help children understand and manage upsetting feelings and behaviours. Foster carers receive comprehensive advice through consultations with the agency's clinical psychologist, which informs their care and gives them strategies to use to care for children safely. Training offered to foster carers also supports them to increase their knowledge of childhood trauma and gain additional insight into children's lived experiences.

There are plans in place to pilot further training for staff, beginning next year, about the impact of trauma. The purpose of this training is to provide social workers with a therapeutic framework for offering enhanced support and reflective practice to foster carers with a view to building their resilience and understanding.

One foster carer's recordings, which were seen by inspectors, evidenced an exemplary response to possible sexually harmful behaviours experienced by the child in their care. The foster carer's response was empathetic and child focused. Through this skilled approach, the foster carer was able to gain an understanding of the child's experience. This contributed to a multi-agency response to ensure the child was safeguarded.

The recruitment of foster carers, which is undertaken by the agency's central recruitment team, has a strong emphasis on safeguarding. A comprehensive range of reference checks are completed on foster carers. This includes contacting carers' former partners if applicable. This prevents those who are unsuitable having access to children.

The assessments of proposed foster carers are thorough and reports are comprehensive. Any issues which may impact on the carers' ability to keep children safe is addressed. All appropriate action is taken to ensure that children are safe and their physical and emotional well-being are supported.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has been in post for seven years and is suitably qualified and experienced. She provides stability to the staff team and to foster carers. The registered manager works with managers in the agency's centralised recruitment and referral teams to ensure there is joined-up practice across the organisation. This supports excellent outcomes for children.

A centralised quality assurance team undertakes audits of care records. These audits support staff to drive practice improvement.

There is a lack of management oversight and decision-making recorded on foster carers or children's records. Leaders and managers authorise assessments and plans, but there is little evidence on care records of what decisions they are making to support and guide the practice of staff.

The staff team has been stable, with no changes since the last inspection. Staff work well as a team and are very supportive of one another. They have manageable workloads, which allows them to offer frequent support to their foster carers. Staff say they are well supported by their manager. They receive regular, good-quality reflective supervision that supports their practice.

A small number of foster carers are significantly behind with their recordings and with training. There is drift and delay, and this is not addressed effectively by supervising social workers or the registered manager. As a result, some foster carers are out of timescales for mandatory training, including in the training, support and development standards. The agency does not have the recording it needs from foster carers to have appropriate oversight of foster carers' practice and the progress of children. Children's care records are incomplete.

The quality of work undertaken by the fostering panel and by the independent reviewing officer is a key strength of the agency. The agency decision-maker, panel chair and vice chair are very experienced and there are excellent processes in place for pre-panel scrutiny of cases coming to panel. The processes in place ensure that the panel is focused and that deferrals are extremely rare. This also prevents carers from experiencing delay at the panel stage of application and approval. There are good examples of when further information has been sought and when necessary additional specialist assessment has been provided.

Quarterly managerial meetings include the panel advisor, agency decision-maker, panel chair and registered manager. They provide a forum for challenge, discussion and identifying important areas of learning and development.

The independent reviewing officer has a wealth of experience that he brings to his role of reviewing carers. He has excellent knowledge of the supervising social workers and their strengths and areas for development. He considers the agency to be highly receptive to the advice and recommendations he makes. There is a strong sense of established communication that ensures that any issues identified are tracked, and if necessary, early reviews are held. There is strong evidence that reviews conclude with action plans where necessary and that these are tracked, and any repeated themes are addressed.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>Specifically, that children’s risk assessments accurately reflect the severity of the risk presented; there is a robust response to concerns about the behaviour of foster carers towards children; and children’s wishes and feelings are gathered and considered following incidents in the foster home.</p>	6 January 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care, for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child’s care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6 (3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (3))</p>	6 January 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers, fostering service staff and volunteers understand what they must do if they receive an allegation or have suspicions that a person may have: behaved in a way that has, or may have, harmed a child; possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or behaved towards a child in a way that indicates he or she is unsuitable to work with children. This relates to ensuring that information in relation to allegations made by children against foster carers is shared swiftly and any delay in response from the child’s placing authority is addressed in a timely manner. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 22.1)

- The registered person should ensure that staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). Ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. Specifically, this relates to ensuring that foster carers' recordings are completed in a timely manner. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.2)

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). For foster carers who were approved as such before April 2008, the Standards are attained by April 2011 (or by April 2012 for family and friends foster carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook. Specifically, foster carers should maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.3)

- The registered person should ensure that decision making is recorded in foster carers and children's records. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.5)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC485778

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Registered provider address: Wavendon Tower, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

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Inspectors

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

Pauline Yates, Social Care Inspector

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