

Orange Grove Fostercare Three Shires

Orange Grove Fostercare Limited, Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is part of a large national company that supports foster carers. This agency is based in Milton Keynes and offers short-term, long-term, parent-and-child and respite placements across the Midlands and East of England areas. At the time of this inspection, there were 72 children living in 43 fostering households.

The manager registered with Ofsted in March 2021.

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

Inspection dates: 30 January to 3 February 2023

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 4 June 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive good care from committed foster carers. Foster carers help children to feel valued and to enjoy a sense of belonging in their family. Children spoke positively about their experiences and the support that they receive in their foster families.

Most children enjoy stability and move on in planned ways at a pace that is right for them. This includes children staying with foster carers after their 18th birthday in 'staying put' arrangements. Foster carers help children to learn practical skills for adulthood and to prepare for university.

Matching decisions about where children will live are generally good. Supervising social workers, who have good knowledge of the fostering household, complete detailed matching reports. These are overseen and signed off by the manager. However, in one instance, a child moved into the fostering household before all the information that the agency requested was received from the local authority. Therapy is currently being sourced for the child and training arranged for the foster carer. However, this could have been addressed more quickly.

Foster carers provide good support to help children maintain relationships with people who are important to them. Many children live with their brothers and sisters. Children benefit from spending time with their family and friends in the fostering household. This includes children's family members visiting to help celebrate birthdays. Consequently, children feel accepted.

All children attend an education provision. Most children make good progress from their starting points. Children's attendance and progress are monitored by an education coordinator, who uses their expertise to help resolve issues around education planning. This means that foster carers receive effective support to challenge reductions in education timetables or delays in the provision of resources that individual children need.

Foster carers help children to learn new skills. This is guided by an independence booklet that has been developed by the agency. The booklet includes access to the agency's training programmes on first aid and safeguarding. Foster carers supporting parent-and-child arrangements provide sensitive guidance to and supervision of the parent, in line with care plans.

Staff provide creative and meaningful support to children about their culture. This helps children to understand their heritage and gain a positive sense of identity.

Staff run regular events for foster carers and children. Children help to decide what these activities will be. Children who remain with their foster families after their 18th birthday continue to join activities and contribute at foster carers' forums to share

their experiences of 'staying put' and how this benefits children. This is testament to the lasting relationships that they have established with their foster carers and staff.

The agency provides excellent support to foster carers, who value the team's expertise and the thoughtfulness of the manager. This included a high level of support to foster carers caring for children with physical health needs and vulnerabilities through COVID-19 lockdowns. Staff are creative in the practical support that they provide to relieve the pressures on foster carers. Examples include paying for household tasks to be undertaken, such as cleaning and ironing, and organising takeaway meals.

Supervising social workers complete assessments of back-up carers. This ensures that foster carers have a good network that they can rely on for practical support. Children stay with familiar adults when their foster carers have a break.

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

Foster carers respond to risk appropriately to help keep children safe. Children identify their foster carers as trusted adults with whom they would share their worries.

Foster carers are supported by their supervising social workers to write detailed safer caring plans that outline the rules for everyone in the household. This helps to keep everyone safe. Risk assessments for individual children are comprehensive and foster carers understand the risks to children. However, the plans are not consistently updated following an incident.

When children go missing from home, foster carers report this quickly to the relevant professionals. Foster carers receive good support from the agency, including out-of-hours support when needed.

The agency regularly commissions a psychotherapist to provide foster carers with training or individual sessions as needed. This helps foster carers to understand trauma and to respond sensitively to children's feelings and behaviour. When children are held, it is proportionate and required to keep the child safe.

The agency provides a good offer of online and face-to-face training. This includes bitesize learning at coffee mornings and bespoke presentations on subjects such as online grooming to support foster carers' learning in different ways. Most carers have completed training that is identified by the agency as mandatory. This includes training around first aid and safeguarding.

Recruitment of staff and foster carers is thorough. The foster panel is diverse, with panel members bringing a breadth of knowledge and experience. This enables the panel to provide effective scrutiny of new applicants and the ongoing suitability of foster carers. The panel uses learning from foster carer reviews and resignations to help explore how new carers will manage the challenges of fostering and offer children stability.

Supervising social workers provide a high level of support to foster carers. This includes weekly supervision meetings for parent-and-child arrangements and additional unannounced visits to foster carers' homes. Supervising social workers regularly spend time with children and have a good knowledge of each child's vulnerabilities. The enhanced understanding of the fostering household and increased levels of supervision are additional safeguarding practices that reduce risks.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The manager was promoted to the role from within the agency. She has relevant experience in fostering and is nearing completion of the required level 5 qualification. She leads a culture of nurture and respect that is felt by the team and foster carers.

The manager has a clear vision for the development of the agency. This includes the introduction of therapeutic parenting models, which are starting to embed. This approach is supported by senior managers and championed by the team, including the psychotherapist and participation officer.

Supervising social workers are experienced and motivated. There is high morale in the team, and staff feel well supported by the manager and each other. Supervising social workers have manageable caseloads, which means they are available and responsive to their foster carers.

Foster carers and staff take action to keep children safe when incidents occur. Concerns are escalated appropriately to other agencies and multi-agency plans are implemented. However, actions are not consistently in line with the agency's own policies on managing behaviour or allegations against foster carers. This has included, on one occasion, a failure to notify Ofsted of a notifiable event. Consequently, Ofsted did not have a current view of the incident.

The manager has a good knowledge of the children and foster carers who the agency is supporting. However, management monitoring systems are not effective. As a result, incidents of restraint and going missing from care and allegations against foster carers are not collated centrally or easily accessible to review. Although suitable action is taken to reduce the risks to children, this shortfall lessens the manager's ability to identify trends and respond to increasing risks.

Case records do not provide a clear chronology of the actions taken, the outcome or the manager's decision-making when incidents occur. This means that important information could be missed by the agency when reviewing the support needs and suitability of foster carers and the vulnerability of children.

Supervising social workers use age-appropriate language when writing in children's records. Foster carers' records are regular and clear but not yet using 'language that

cares', as adopted by the agency. This does not ensure that those records are accessible to children now and in the future.

The manager and her team have formed effective working relationships with other agencies. Children's social workers are positive about the communication between them and the agency.

One fostering household is caring for more children than allowed within the usual fostering limit. Conversations with the children's social workers took place and careful planning for this arrangement is in place. However, the manager did not obtain the required exemption from the host local authority. The manager progressed this during the inspection.

The manager has not fully met all the shortfalls raised at the previous inspection. This does not support the continual improvement of the agency.

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 must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 35 (1)(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that management information accurately collates and allows for monitoring and review of: any allegations or suspicions of abuse or neglect in respect of children placed with foster parents and the outcome of any investigation; the use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home; and any child missing from a foster parent’s home without permission.</p> <p>This requirement was raised at the last inspection and is restated.</p>	3 March 2023
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that Ofsted is notified of any notifiable events.</p> <p>This requirement was raised as a recommendation at the last inspection and is restated.</p>	3 March 2023
<p>A person may exceed the usual fostering limit if he is exempted from it by the local authority within whose area he lives.</p> <p>Where a local authority exempt a person, they shall inform him by notice in writing—</p> <p>that he is so exempted;</p>	3 March 2023

<p>of the children, described by name, whom he may foster; and</p> <p>of any condition to which the exemption is subject. (Children Act 1989 Schedule 7 4 (1) (3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	
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Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children’s safety and welfare are promoted in all fostering placements. In particular, ensure that risk assessments and actions to reduce risk are current and reflect the known risks to each child. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 4.1)
- The registered person should 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. When gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure that the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. In particular, ensure that all information about the child is obtained to inform matching considerations and to avoid any delays in arranging and providing support to the child and their foster carers. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that support and training are made available to foster carers to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. This relates to ensuring that foster carers’ training needs are reviewed after incidents and any training identified is provided without delay. (Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the agency’s policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. In particular, the provider should ensure that the behaviour management policy is followed after an incident of restraint, and staff follow the agency’s own ‘managing allegations’ procedures following a concern about a foster carer. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that entries in records and decisions and reasons for them are legible. In particular, the provider should ensure that decision-making by managers is clearly recorded on children’s and foster carers’ files. (‘Fostering Services: national minimum standards’, 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children should be actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 26.6)

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: SC485761

Registered provider: Orange Grove FosterCare Ltd

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

Responsible individual: Joanne August

Registered manager: Erica Eversfield

Telephone number: 01908263488

Inspectors

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector
Miquette Novella, Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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