

Orange Grove Fostercare Southern Counties

Orange Grove Fostercare Ltd

3, Albourne Court, Henfield Road, Albourne, BN6 9FF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Orange Grove Fostercare Southern Counties is a regional branch of a large privately owned organisation, Polaris. Orange Grove London and Essex region merged with Southern Counties in October 2022.

This agency has 100 children in placements and 76 fostering households. The agency provides emergency, short-term, long-term, and parent-and-child placements for children up to the age of 18. The agency also maintains placements for those who have moved onto independence and wish to remain with their foster carer.

Inspection dates: 6 to 10 February 2023

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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: 14 January 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

The relationships between children and their foster carers are built on acceptance, stability, and outstanding care.

Children are happy and settled in long-term placements, with many children wanting to remain with their foster carers once they reach independence and adulthood. The level of progress can be best illustrated by children's levels of success. For example, one child has been offered sponsorship to enable them to pursue their interest in sport. Another child has been offered a placement on an apprenticeship scheme.

Children feel safe and know that their foster carers care about them. They feel part of a family and look forward to going 'home.' One child said their foster carers 'Are just really nice and I can talk to them', another child said that 'I do not argue with them because they explain things and I love them too much.'

All children are accessing education. There is excellent communication with partner agencies to ensure that there is a whole-child approach to enabling children to achieve academic success. As a result of this diligence to learning, young people are now attending universities and making plans for their future.

Children have many opportunities to express their point of view, with many examples of how their voice has influenced decisions.

Children enjoy being part of the agency's family network. They know the agency staff well and take part in planning events, including giving back to the community. For example, children have supported a homeless shelter by providing essential items.

Parent and child placements are a strength of this agency. The support is creative and practical. Foster carers support parents to appreciate family life and to have positive experiences with their children.

The role of the therapeutic practitioner plays a central part in the agency's success. Foster carers and the staff team access this resource to support them through stressful experiences or difficult personal circumstances.

Children's cultural and ethnic needs are met well. The registered manager is proactive in ensuring that staff and carers stay up to date with current affairs through team meetings and support groups. This provides added knowledge and insight into the care of children. However, when a child's first language is not English, an interpreter is not always secured.

Foster carers told inspectors that they are supported, listened to, and heard. Creative packages of care have helped to prevent placement breakdown.

Foster carers' commitment to care is exemplary. They offer children emotional and practical support at the point of need. However, foster carers do not currently have access to regular respite options. This means that, in an emergency, children may be placed with foster carers who are less familiar with their needs.

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

Excellent safeguarding practice is embedded throughout the agency. Practice is transparent and embraces learning from incidents or events.

All staff and foster carers are appropriately qualified and have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide informed care for every child.

All foster carers and staff have received all relevant mandatory training. In addition, bespoke training is facilitated by the agency. For example, some foster carers have received bespoke training in understanding child sexual exploitation.

Clear and concise risk assessments provide foster carers with relevant information. This enables them to provide the necessary level of supervision and support. This increases the ability of children to successfully take age-appropriate risks.

Children rarely go missing from their foster carers' care. When this does happen, all the appropriate action is taken to ensure that the child is safely returned home. The strong cohesive partnerships between professionals help to ensure that any child at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation receives early help.

Allegations against foster carers are managed in a timely and effectively manner. Recording is thorough, and learning is actively threaded back into practice and the whole fostering network. Peer learning and support via the fostering support group enable open dialogue between carers and encourage increased communication as another form of support and debrief for one another. The registered manager is working tirelessly to improve these, given the vast logistical area since the merging of two regions.

When the care provided by foster carers falls short of the high expectations of the agency, swift action is taken. When concerns about a foster carer are raised, these are managed efficiently and thoroughly. Foster carers are challenged appropriately, and records reflect learning and outcomes.

The registered manager and senior managers have strong oversight and knowledge of significant events. This monitoring enables them to quickly identify themes and patterns. In one example, this quick insight resulted in staff and foster carers receiving additional training in recognising signs of abuse.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

This agency benefits from a compassionate, determined, and pragmatic registered manager. They are supported by an equally passionate and child-focused team manager and principal social worker.

Staff feel valued and well supported by their managers. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to the children and foster carers whom they support. This well-established team provides stability to children and their foster carers.

Monitoring systems are highly effective. The registered manager is tenacious in their approach to embed outstanding practice throughout the agency. Leaders and managers know the strengths of the agency and are meticulous in identifying areas of performance that may fall short of their high expectations.

The merger of the two regions has been managed extremely well by the registered manager. Conscientious planning, organisation and excellent communication have enabled the successful transition of carers and children. The whole staff team embraced the challenge, with positive outcomes.

Quality assurance and the registered manager's own review of the quality of care provide comprehensive oversight and reporting to the senior leadership team. Sometimes reviews omit the views of the children. However, children have many opportunities to share and express their feelings and opinions, for example, through their looked after child reviews and through feedback questionnaires.

Supervising social workers receive practice-related supervision. Group sessions offer dedicated time for reflective practice and enable staff to be resourceful and inquisitive about their practice.

The fostering panel consists of an appropriately qualified and experienced membership. The panel is chaired by a long-standing independent chair who knows the agency well. The agency's decision-maker provides a high level of scrutiny to ensure that decision-making is sound.

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

Recommendations

- The service has the facilities to work with children with physical, sensory, and learning impairments, communication difficulties or for whom English is not their first language. Oral and written communications are made available in a format which is appropriate to the language of the individual. The procedures include arrangements for reading, translating, and explaining documents to those people who are unable to understand the document. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.12)
- Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are - planned to take account of the needs of any children placed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.5)

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: SC485748

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