

# Compass Fostering London Limited

Compass Fostering London Limited  
135 Albany Road, Hornchurch, Essex RM12 4AQ  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Compass Fostering London Limited is a part of a larger group of independent agencies, children's homes and schools that belong to the Compass Community. This agency operates from the main office in Hornchurch, and from additional offices in Brixton and Wembley. The agency has 278 approved foster carers living in 185 households. In the period of 12 months leading up to 1 April 2017, the agency approved 22 new households. On 1 April 2017, through acquisition of two independent agencies, the agency doubled in size. There are 225 children and young people currently placed with this agency from a number of London boroughs and further afield. The agency provides a range of services, such as emergency, respite, short-term, long-term, and parent and child placements.

**Inspection dates:** 31 July to 4 August 2017

**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 **good**

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

**Date of last inspection:** 4 November 2013

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children and young people make good progress and say that this is a good agency.
- Children and young people have positive experiences and enjoy having fulfilling lives.
- Children and young people achieve positive outcomes in education, health and emotional and social development.
- Foster carers describe the support they receive as being reliable and dependable, with some saying the agency is 'first class'.
- Local authorities talk positively about the agency and the good quality of fostering placements that it provides.
- The agency has strong leaders and managers. It is effectively and efficiently led by an experienced and highly competent registered manager.
- The agency is well resourced and fulfils the statement of purpose.
- Children and young people receive excellent educational and psychological services.
- The agency's safeguarding practices protect children and young people from harm and promote their safety effectively.
- The agency provides competent foster carers from diverse backgrounds and with varied life experiences.
- Foster carers advocate for children and young people like a good parent would.
- The behaviour management practices are effective. Foster carers promote, support and celebrate children and young people's positive behaviours consistently.
- The agency processes referrals and manages placements, including emergency placements, with efficiency and professionalism.
- Comprehensive monitoring systems ensure that leaders, managers and staff are clear about the agency's strengths and weaknesses.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Risk management practice is inconsistent.
- The inconsistent use of the agency's system for record-keeping undermines the quality of monitoring.
- Foster carers do not receive specific training on female genital mutilation, forced marriages or honour-related violence.

## 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>Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare</p> <p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that - (a) the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>In particular, be able to evidence that good risk management practices are implemented consistently.</p>	01/12/2017
<p>Review of quality of care</p> <p>The registered person must maintain a system for - (a) monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 35(1))</p> <p>In particular, improve the implementation of this system so that it is used consistently by all staff members.</p>	01/12/2017

### Recommendations

- Consider providing specific training on a wider range of safeguarding subjects, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages and honour-related violence. (NMS 20)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency has a positive impact on the lives of children and young people. Through its skilled foster carers, the agency has helped many children and young people to make good progress across different areas of their lives. Some children and young people have made excellent progress in some aspects of their lives. The high quality of foster care has resulted in children and young people's life chances being improved. A young person said: 'I would have never achieved this much, if I stayed with my parents.'

The agency enriches the lives of children and young people. It gives them confidence, expands their views about what they can achieve and enables them to work towards meeting their goals.

Children and young people talk positively about their experiences of being fostered. They understand how they came to be in care. Children and young people also say they feel heard and valued, and enjoy their lives. They make choices and participate in the plans for their future. Children and young people appreciate the good opportunities that this agency has brought to them by placing them with good families. They say that they feel comfortable and safe, and that they have everything they need. They know how to make requests and complaints. They judge this agency to be a good one. They say that they don't know how it could be better.

Children and young people feel fully included into the life of their foster family. A child wrote in the Ofsted survey: 'My foster carer is very kind. She is nice. She treats me like her own family.' Some children and young people refer to their main female carer as 'mum' and call other children in the fostering household 'brothers and sisters'. They have formed secure attachments and feelings of belonging.

Children and young people receive good care. Foster families always warmly welcome children and young people into their fold. For example, an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person was overwhelmed at how the family welcomed him. He arrived straight from a refugee camp that is based overseas. Good matching ensured that he shares the language and cultural background with his foster carer; the young person really appreciates this. The young person was keen to learn about his new home country and appreciated the carer teaching him about the British ways of life. This is also an example of the agency's effectiveness in promoting diversity, as well as facilitating young people's integration into British society.

Foster carers provide a stable and nurturing environment to children and young people, regardless of the length of their placement. They help children and young people to maintain contact and healthy relationships with their birth families, in line with the local authorities' placement plans. Foster carers work in partnership with parents whenever that is in the best interest of a child or a young person. For example, the agency recently contributed to the arrangements for a child to reunite with her father. This was after the child did not have contact with her father for

many years. The agency manages endings, either planned or unplanned, in a sensitive manner.

The agency's provision for educational support is exceptional. Children and young people receive excellent support to learn in differing ways and engage in formal education. The organisation has a highly developed educational service. This service provides comprehensive advice and direct support to foster carers to enable them to carry on good work in the family environment. The agency has its own 'virtual headteacher' whose main role is to promote good learning outcomes for children and young people. Some foster carers have become the agency's educational ambassadors and experiential educators. They, too, provide additional support to foster carers and children and young people. As a result of the enhanced support, children and young people have made good, and in some cases outstanding, educational progress. The agency's monitoring data shows that the children and young people's school attendance is better than the national average for children who are looked after. The last available attendance figure was for the spring term 2017 and was 91.8%. The data also shows that the individual children and young people's attendance has improved over time. These are some of the examples of children and young people's recent attainments and personal achievements:

- getting a 'learner of the year award' for children in care
- achieving above expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics
- surpassing all expectations and achieving good test results after a three-month exclusion from a classroom
- receiving 'good' or 'excellent' in nearly all subjects at school
- outstanding work in science, history and mathematics
- scoring three goals in a school match
- contributing to the good management of a situation that involved a distressed swan.

Children and young people receive good support to be healthy. Foster carers make sure that children and young people have access to health professionals, and that their health is regularly monitored. Foster carers work closely with health and other professionals to ensure that children and young people with medical conditions have their needs met and continue to make progress. For example, a young child who came to a foster family with serious mobility issues is now walking independently. At the end-of-year performance at the school, the child even attempted to dance on the stage. Before the placement began, medical professionals had expressed concerns about whether this child would ever be able to walk.

Foster carers have high aspirations for children and young people. They believe in their children and young people and are prepared to challenge professionals to do whatever is possible to help children and young people to overcome any barriers to their progress. An example of excellent advocacy on behalf of a child is a foster family that has called for a full medical review of a child's diagnosis of epilepsy. The basis for the challenge is that no epileptic seizures have been observed for a number of years.

Foster carers have a good understanding of children and young people's emotional

and psychological needs. The agency's psychological services and enhanced training for foster carers make strong contributions to this understanding. The agency follows a theory-based practice model that focuses on resilience, attachment and aspects of social pedagogy. Foster carers are skilled at helping children and young people to build a secure emotional base. These feelings of safety and belonging enable children and young people to engage and make progress. For example, some children whose experiences of abuse were linked with water now enjoy swimming and diving. This demonstrates the excellent progress that they have made in overcoming their traumas.

Children and young people enjoy having a choice from a wide range of relaxing, recreational, sporting, artistic, cultural and faith-based activities. They go on holidays and visit places of interest with their foster families. Children and young people have fun, develop hobbies and fulfil their talents. Starting from a visit to a local karate club, one young person has become the world champion in his category. He said that he would have never achieved that if it wasn't for the foster carer who supported him all the way. He said that it was a team effort, and that this agency played a great part in it.

Foster carers prepare children and young people well for their futures. They help young people to develop life skills and independence, effectively. Foster carers say that they treat their foster children as if they were their own children. They say that their doors are always open for young people to come in, including after they have left care. Young people have a good understanding of their rights, entitlements and care arrangements, including what it means to be in a 'staying put' arrangement. A young person talked about how nice it was to know that when he went to the university, there would always be a room for him to come back to in his foster family home.

The agency gives children and young people opportunities to influence the development of the service. These are some examples where children and young people have made a difference to the fostering practice by contributing their views: how best to welcome a foster child at the beginning of the placement, and the important questions to ask when assessing prospective foster carers at the fostering panel or when recruiting social workers.

All of the agency's activities are child and young person-centred. Assessments of prospective carers give a good picture of their skills and capacities to meet the needs of children and young people. The foster carers describe the assessment process as thorough and respectful. They feel listened to and understood. The approved foster carers say that the agency is listening and supportive.

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

The agency ensures that children and young people receive safe care and have their safety promoted effectively. Safeguarding children and young people is given a high priority, and is integral to everything the agency does. This is clearly evidenced at all levels of the organisation.

The agency's channels for sharing of information are effective. A comprehensive framework of meetings and the existence of the agency's own safeguarding board underpin good communication about safeguarding issues. Children and young people with known high and low risks are included on the agency's risk register. This approach demonstrates the agency's proactive approach to risk management. This register is regularly reviewed and discussed at the senior level within the agency. Children and young people benefit from the oversight of their care by the senior leadership team.

The agency's arrangements for risk management and the quality assurance of the practices are good overall. In the great majority of cases, good practices have been followed. However, there have been some instances in which drift and delay in completing risk assessments occurred. For example, it took several weeks to complete a formal risk assessment and management plan for one child. On another occasion, an existing risk assessment was not reviewed formally within the timeframe set by the agency. The review took place almost four months later than planned. This was despite the emergence of new concerns.

Leaders, managers and staff acknowledge that risk management is an area for improvement. They agree that the inconsistent quality of the recorded risk assessments and management plans undermines the quality of the practice. On rare occasions, when the agency did not evidence that robust and up-to-date risk assessments were in place, other evidence showed that the appropriate actions were taken to minimise the risks. The weaknesses that were highlighted in the examples given did not stop the agency from enabling the foster carers to use effective safeguarding strategies with children and young people, and keep them safe. There has been no observed negative impact of the weakness in the risk management practice on the children and young people's welfare.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of incidents, complaints, allegations, consultations and other significant data influence the organisation's thinking, plans and actions. For example, a review of an incident in which a child sustained an injury has led to the following actions:

- more stringent enforcement of the requirement for the supervising social workers to check bedrooms and sleeping arrangements regularly
- at least one of the two unannounced visits to foster families being carried out by a social worker who is not the supervising social worker for that household
- more proactive and firmer challenges to the decisions made by the children's social workers.

These actions have minimised the risks of a similar incident occurring again.

The recruitment, assessment, preparation, training and annual reviews of foster carers has a strong focus on keeping children and young people safe. A robust fostering panel makes a meaningful contribution to the quality of safeguarding within the agency.

The safeguarding focus continues throughout the duration of the foster carers' approval. The agency's social workers visit foster families frequently. They provide carers with thorough supervision and good support. Additionally to seeing foster carers, supervising social workers see children and young people on their own on a regular basis. This provides children and young people with opportunities to speak openly with another professional about their experiences. Children and young people know the supervising social workers by name, and have confidence in them.

Children and young people say that they feel safe and protected. They have developed close relationships with their foster families. Children and young people trust the adults who look after them, and know that they are listened to and taken seriously. They feel well prepared for life outside the safe foster family environment, and understand the risks that might be facing them. Children and young people know what they need to do to make themselves safer. They are prepared to ask for help, if they need it, and know how to complain.

The agency has developed effective links with the local authorities and other key safeguarding agencies. Managers and staff work closely with partner agencies to minimise any risks to children and young people whose behaviours put them at risk. Risk management plans are in place, and are being implemented when there are known risks. For example, children and young people who go missing receive effective and well-coordinated responses that are in line with the statutory guidance.

The agency is able to take a lead on achieving good safeguarding practice, when it is necessary. Leaders, managers and staff are prepared to challenge other professionals to make sure that children and young people receive the most protective and consistent responses. An example of this is how actively they pursued fuller information from the local authority regarding the risks to a child of being radicalised. This has resulted in a more robust and joint approach to safeguarding the child. As a result, the child and the people around them are safer.

The agency supports foster carers well to carry out their safeguarding role effectively. Comprehensive training, information, support and advice equip foster carers with the knowledge and skills necessary for their work.

Foster carers' safeguarding and behaviour management practices are effective. Foster carers provide a safe family environment with clear boundaries. The strength of positive relationships within the foster families enables foster carers to enforce expectations about safe and acceptable behaviours.

Foster carers promote, support and celebrate children and young people's positive behaviours. This approach has had a major positive impact on children and young people's feelings and behaviours. Their confidence has grown, and their behaviours have improved. An example of excellent practice is how the foster carers enabled a child to manage his behaviours without having to take any medicine. The child had been prescribed this medicine to help control his challenging behaviours. The child had taken this medication for a long time. With the foster carers' effective behaviour management practice, the medicines were not needed.



The agency's practices in relation to unannounced visits to foster families and regular health and safety checks are strong. They enhance further the agency's commitment to providing safe families and high-standard care.

Thorough staff recruitment procedures and robust recruitment of foster carers ensure that everybody who works for the agency is suitable for their roles.

The agency follows up any allegations or suspicions of harm in accordance with statutory guidance. Appropriate referrals are made without delays. The links with designated officers and local authorities are effective. Any investigations are handled objectively and fairly, and in ways that best support children and young people's safety. Foster carers receive additional independent support, in those situations.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Compassion, energy and high professionalism characterise the leadership and management of this agency. Leaders and managers are highly ambitious about improving lives of children and young people and helping them to achieve their potential. They have high expectations from their staff and foster carers. A shared vision of making a tangible difference in the lives of fostered children and young people inspires and unites staff within this agency.

The size and the complexity of the organisation's services have resulted in highly developed systems and comprehensive policies, procedures and protocols. The responsible individual expressed the directors' commitment to do everything they possibly could to eradicate chances of a human error. Providing the best care to children and young people has remained firmly at the centre of all activities at the agency, and the wider organisation as a whole.

The record-keeping in the agency is effective overall. It supports good management oversight. It enables the registered manager to have detailed knowledge of the agency. An example relates to the scrutiny of physical interventions at a low level: a foster carer pulled a child's shirt to prevent them from leaving a safe space; the registered manager received an alert to review the incident.

However, there have been some inconsistencies in how staff members have used the recording system. The issues regarding records relating to risk management have already been noted in this report. There have also been some instances when a staff member did not enter the information appropriately on the agency's electronic information system. For example, on two occasions when the police visited a foster carer's home to investigate allegations that the child had committed an offence, this was not appropriately logged. These recording omissions have resulted in the registered manager not being made aware of the incidents. The fact that the system is not being used efficiently by all relevant staff undermines the sharing of information and the quality of monitoring.

The agency is well resourced to achieve its statement of purpose. In particular, the

educational and psychological services add value to the fostering service. Other teams, such as staff working in marketing, recruitment, placement and administration, make strong contributions to the overall good effectiveness and efficacy of the agency. For example, a change in a marketing strategy has resulted in a huge increase in the number of enquiries from members of the public. People from all walks of life have contacted the agency and learned about fostering. In some cases, they have put themselves forward for an assessment to become foster carers. The agency promotes a positive image of fostering and recruits foster carers effectively.

The agency is managed effectively and efficiently by an experienced and highly competent registered manager. The registered manager oversees the management of all three offices. Each of the offices has its own manager of operations. Social work staff receive good quality supervision and support. The effectiveness of their practice and their individual performance are subject to regular reviews, reflection and professional challenge. This, together with good training opportunities, helps them to develop their professional practice further. Staff describe the agency's management's style as calm and very supportive. Being supported well themselves underpins the good support that they provide to foster carers.

Foster carers say that they enjoy working for this agency. They appreciate the support that they receive and describe it as 'first class'. They see the agency as being reliable and dependable. They say that the agency is always there for them whenever they need support and advice, no matter what time of day or night it is. They say that all staff who work for the agency are friendly and approachable. Foster carers also support each other through the agency's carer-support ambassadors. The foster carers who receive enhanced psychological support say that it was of excellent quality. It had a really positive impact on the whole foster family. A foster carer said that she learned how to achieve better emotional protection for herself and others around her.

Regional and national forums within the wider organisation enable foster carers to network and feel part of the wider fostering community within the organisation. Foster carers feel that their contributions to the care of children and young people are respected and valued. With the agency's support, they collaborate well with the network of professionals to help children and young people to achieve positive outcomes. They attend multi-disciplinary and statutory meetings, and advocate well for children and young people in their care.

Local authorities talk positively about the agency and the quality of fostering placements that it provides. The agency processes referrals and manages placements, including emergency placements, with efficiency and professionalism.

The agency provides competent foster carers from diverse backgrounds and with varied life experiences. It has foster carers who can meet a wide range of the linguistic and ethnic needs of many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people in London and beyond. Many carers are bilingual, and some speak fluently in more than two languages. The placements of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people are highly effective. This is also true of cases in

which the ethnic match was apparently imperfect. For example, a young person did not wish to move when a closer ethnic match was found.

Taking into account the ethnic profile of the referrals, it would be prudent for the agency to consider providing training to all carers about some specific safeguarding issues, particularly those that arise from the harmful attitudes and practices that are not uncommon in some parts of the world, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages and honour-based violence.

Foster carers' commitment to children and young people, and the skills that they have developed, are impressive. The agency offers comprehensive induction and training programmes that carers value very highly. The fostering panel quality-assures the approval of foster carers at the beginning of their fostering careers and at regular intervals afterwards.

The agency has a strong fostering panel. A highly experienced and competent chair ensures that the proceedings are compliant and fair, and contribute to the agency's robustness and development. The panel's frequent meetings across the wider organisation help to build on the effectiveness of the panel and the expertise of its members.

The agency's decision maker is the registered manager of another fostering agency within the wider organisation. This cross-working is allowing additional autonomy, robust audit and challenge to other regions.

The recent improvement actions focused around developing competencies of the staff and foster carers who recently joined this agency, through acquisitions. Some of the topics explored were stability of placements, back-up care, use of respite, room-sharing and critical thinking. The recent development initiatives have included creating two new roles:

- a 16+ co-ordinator to specifically focus on helping older teenagers with their careers
- an advanced social work practitioner to join the panel assessment manager in focusing on quality-assuring the assessments of prospective carers.

Comprehensive monitoring systems ensure that leaders, managers and staff are clear about the agency's strengths and weaknesses. The registered manager has a comprehensive development and improvement plan in place. This ensures that a minimum of good professional standards are consistently achieved across all the agency's activities.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to

the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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:** SC033806

**Registered provider:** Compass Fostering London Limited

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## **Inspectors**

Seka Graovac, social care inspector

Christine Kennet, social care inspector



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