

Compass Fostering South

Compass Fostering South Limited
Compass Fostering South Limited, Unimer House, Dominion Way, Rustington,
Littlehampton, West Sussex BN16 3HQ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Compass Fostering South Limited is an independent fostering agency. The head office is based in Rustington, West Sussex with additional office premises in Fareham in Hampshire, Stroud in Gloucestershire and Gravesend in Kent. The agency is one of five branches of Compass Fostering Services, which is part of Compass Community, a private limited company.

Compass Fostering South provides short breaks, short-term, long-term, emergency, and parent and child foster placements. At the time of this inspection, the agency supported 249 households caring for 274 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 26 February to 2 March 2018

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: 12 January 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The registered manager has established a strong ethos of transparency and openness within clear lines of accountability and responsibility across the agency. All those working for the agency understand their role in keeping children and young people safe. This includes the agency staff and foster carers providing each other with suitable challenge and voicing any concerns promptly.
- Staff and foster carers demonstrate a good understanding and awareness of the needs and vulnerabilities of children placed with the agency. They use their knowledge to manage risks to children and young people effectively, taking their age and ability into account.
- Children and young people feel safe and valued by their carers and the agency staff. They build strong relationships, develop secure attachments and gain a sense of belonging.
- Foster carers benefit from comprehensive support and training that equips them to care for children well.
- Children enjoy good health, do well in education and enjoy a range of activities through the proactive and effective support of their foster carers and the agency.
- There are very well-established systems and processes that monitor, analyse and evaluate the work of the agency and drive improvement.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Not all recruitment has been undertaken to the highest standard of safe recruitment, although shortfalls were found only on one file.
- The majority of recommendations are made in the light of shortfalls in recording and documentation. This includes the identification of gaps in a placement match; the basis for some statements in risk assessments; and medical consents for children on short breaks and panel minutes, which are variable in quality and do not always demonstrate sufficient challenge.
- Formal systems for supporting children and young people to access advocacy are not well embedded.
- The quality assurance function of the panel does not serve to identify emerging themes, patterns and trends and, therefore, misses an opportunity to support the development 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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>(a) is of integrity and good character;</p> <p>(b) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform;</p> <p>(c) is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform. (Regulation 20(3)(a)(c))</p> <p>In particular, demonstrate that safer recruitment processes to determine the above have been fully implemented.</p>	<p>30 April 2018</p>

Recommendations

- Children’s health is promoted in accordance with their placement plan and foster carers are clear about what responsibilities and decisions are delegated to them and where consent for medical treatment needs to be obtained. (NMS 6.5) In particular, ensure that all of the required parental consents for the administration of first aid and medication are obtained for children on a short break.
- Children have access to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns, which is appropriate to their age and understanding. Children know their rights to advocacy, how to access an advocate and how to contact the Children’s Rights Director. (NMS 1.5) In particular, strengthen the systems to support children who need it to access an advocate.
- Children’s safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation). (NMS 4.1) In particular, record the matters considered and the rationale that underpins the assessment.
- The fostering service only suggests 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. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. (NMS 15.1) In particular,

ensure that all matching forms specify the gaps.

- Fostering panels are intended as multi-disciplinary bodies with a considerable element of independence from the fostering service. This independence means that they cannot themselves make decisions, which are the responsibility of the fostering service, but instead make recommendations in relation to their statutory functions listed below. Decisions are made by the fostering service, through its decision-maker, after taking into account the panel's recommendations (and any recommendation by the independent review mechanism (IRM) – section below on IRM). Panels thereby play an important quality assurance role, providing objectivity and having the ability to challenge practice which is felt to fall short of the Regulations or NMS, or not to be in the interests of children. Panels are required to give regular feedback to the fostering service. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services para 5.2) In particular, formalise the quality assurance function of panel.
- The panel must keep written minutes of its business, including the reasons for recommendations made. It is important that these are full and accurate so that the fostering service is clear about matters discussed and the reasoning behind recommendations, as they will form the basis of decision making by the fostering service. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services para 5.25)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people make good progress from their starting points as a result of living with their foster families. Due to the secure relationships made, many children and young people develop a good sense of belonging. For example, a professional said of one young person, 'He is fully absorbed into the family', and another described a child as 'feeling part of the family'.

Foster carers in general are committed and nurturing, focused on achieving the best that they can for those children and young people living with them. Foster carers, with good-quality support from the agency, provide care tailored to meet the needs of the children and young people that they are looking after. Children receive care informed by their foster carers' sound understanding of attachment needs and styles. This enables foster carers to tailor their responses so that children learn how to make and sustain relationships. For some young people, foster carers are supporting them to move towards independence, developing the skills and knowledge that they will need as adults. This can include young people remaining with foster carers past their eighteenth birthday in 'staying put' arrangements, which one young person described as 'home'.

Children and young people enjoy a range of activities and opportunities, both through their foster families and the agency, which have a positive impact on their self-esteem and well-being. A professional commented, 'X has regained the happiness he had lost.'

The matching of children and young people with foster carers is child focused, and the success of this is seen in the stability of the placements. The supporting documentation does not always evidence a thorough consideration of shortfalls in placement choice. The management team has made some progress from the previous inspection, but this is not fully embedded across the service.

Children, young people and professionals are complimentary about the warmth and welcoming attitude of foster carers. Children and young people benefit from moves into and out of families that are well managed. Children and young people are well supported through well-planned and managed transitions which are led by their needs as far as possible. A parent described the thoughtful series of visits that introduced a regular short-break placement. A young parent spoke very warmly about the significant difference her foster carers have made to her life and that of her child. A professional observed, 'The foster carer has shown real initiative and commitment to understand and engage with X.'

Foster carers provide children and young people with the support necessary to maintain the links and relationships that are important to them. This includes those living a significant distance away from family and friends. One parent said, 'I thank my lucky stars that X became his foster carer.'

Foster carers teach children and young people how to express their wishes and feelings in a safe manner, rather than through challenging behaviour. This is achieved through positive relationships with their carers and the consistent, caring

maintenance of boundaries informed by the therapeutic approach.

Foster carers value education and successfully communicate this to the children, so that the majority of children engage effectively. The organisation has an education service, led by an executive headteacher, which provides a valuable resource for staff and foster carers of the fostering agency. This serves to promote education effectively, from challenging local authorities to provide the type of educational environment that meets a child's needs, to the provision of experiential learning. This new initiative is proving successful at engaging children and young people who have been out of education for some time, or for whom there is not a school place immediately available.

Children and young people enjoy strong support from carers to improve their health. Foster carers are proactive in seeking professional advice and advocate on behalf of the children and young people to good effect. Foster carers receive appropriate guidance and training to care for children who have complex health needs. They also encourage children and young people to adopt healthy lifestyles, through good diets, physical activities and support for smoking cessation. A child placed with a short-break foster carer did not have all of the required parental consents for first aid and medication.

The voice of the children and young people is apparent in many aspects of the work of the agency and, in particular, through foster carer reviews and regular visits to carers' homes. An agency member of staff has recently taken a lead on participation and is developing groups for children and young people, with recent success. Foster carers understand their role in listening to children and young people and advocating for them. One young person said of her foster carer, 'She's good at listening, she will stop what she is doing to listen to me. I feel she is on my side. She knows me well enough to express my views if I can't.' However, systems for gaining formal advocacy for children and young people who need it are not fully embedded.

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

All those working for the agency demonstrate a strong understanding of the holistic nature of safeguarding. This is woven into the recruitment, preparation and assessment of foster carers and in the training and supervision of all those working for the agency. As a result, safeguarding underpins their work with children and young people. The manager successfully promotes an open and transparent approach, encouraging staff and foster carers to share any concerns and provide appropriate challenge to each other. This approach serves to manage, minimise and reduce risks to children and young people through a collective approach to problem-solving and learning. The evidence of the high quality of work in this area, reported by children and young people themselves, as well as those who support them, is not fully reflected in the supporting documents.

Foster carers and staff have a good knowledge of the range of risks that children and young people may be exposed to. Their knowledge is informed by participation in relevant training courses that they all have easy access to. There is strong and frequent management monitoring of children and young people who have identified risks. The manager and her team review their risk register, assess the risk and the

effectiveness of current strategies, and take suitable action in response.

Partnership working is a strong component in keeping children and young people safe, and this has a positive impact on safety plans. Children and young people's vulnerabilities are reduced by the care that they receive from effective, nurturing foster carers. The practical advice and education that they provide help children and young people understand why adults may be concerned about their behaviour and the risks that they may expose themselves to. For some, this has led to a significant reduction in missing from home episodes, a decrease in substance misuse, and informed changes to their appearance and their approach to relationships and social media use. Young people reflect this in their own words. For example, one young person said, 'There is no need to use drugs or drink to get out of reality. I feel cared for.' Young people feel that they are held in mind and so keep in touch with their foster carers, even when they are not where they should be.

The therapeutic approach promoted by the agency is becoming established in the practice of all. Where the therapeutic practice is embedded, the impact of this is securing significant benefits for children and young people. This includes increasing the stability of placements, as foster carers understand behaviour as communication and adapt their responses accordingly. Foster carers have a sound understanding of behaviour management and its place in the therapeutic framework. Several carers quoted the phrase 'time in rather than time out' as their response to children's difficult behaviour, in recognition of such behaviour as an expression of distress. Foster carers are trained in an approved behaviour management method where there is an identified need. The approach focuses on distraction and diversion, but includes physical intervention. Foster carers rarely use physical intervention or sanctions. They are familiar with the need to record any such instances, and the management monitoring of any use of these measures is of a good standard.

The manager and her team have established good links with external safeguarding professionals. Staff and foster carers know what to do in the light of any allegations or disclosures by a child or young person. Their response is swift and appropriate to the nature of the concerns raised, with the welfare of children and young people their first consideration.

From a small sample of recruitment files, one file did not demonstrate a sufficiently thorough and robust application of safer recruitment procedures. The opportunity to explore reasons for an applicant leaving previous roles had not been taken, or reasons for concluding suitability clearly established.

Children and young people live in houses that are safe. This is assured by the agency's annual health and safety checks of carers' homes. Unannounced visits take place as required and the supervising social worker also sees children and young people alone, giving them another opportunity to talk to a trusted professional.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, the organisation has acquired other independent agencies and integrated them into this single registered agency. Senior managers, working in partnership with the registered manager, have planned a reorganisation in recognition of its size and workload. This will see the creation of a Compass South

East region based in Kent. An application for registration of this service is planned for April 2018.

The manager leads by example and models open and transparent communication. She is effective in her leadership of the service. She sets clear aims and objectives for service delivery within the large organisation. The manager has delegated key tasks to middle managers within well-structured operational and strategic lines of responsibility and accountability.

Foster carers benefit from a wide variety of support mechanisms, through the agency's responsive approach to addressing emerging needs and concerns. Foster carers are very complimentary about the role of their supervising social workers in enabling them to look after the children they foster. They give many examples of tailored, practical and emotional support that reflects the individual needs and situations of themselves and the children that they are looking after. This can also include the agency sourcing relevant training opportunities. Support groups are organised to offer as many foster carers as possible easy access to help and support; the group for foster carers looking after children in therapeutic placements is particularly appreciated.

While all value their supervision, not all foster carers make use of the support groups and the range of training available to them. The manager is considering ways to improve participation in the few cases where this is an issue. A very small minority of foster carers have not achieved the training, support and development standards for foster care within the required timescale. This is currently subject to an action plan with evidence of good progress being made. Foster carers also benefit from formal peer support. Foster carers with skills in particular areas are designated 'ambassadors' and provided with the training needed, for example in parent and child placements, or supporting children with autistic spectrum disorder.

The management team provides a child-focused service that supports foster carers effectively in encouraging children and young people to fulfil their potential. Staff and the vast majority of carers use the good systems well to record their first-hand knowledge and experience of the progress of children and young people. This enables valuable oversight of children and young people's achievements and the identification of areas for further development.

Staff are well supported through regular supervision, appraisals, team meetings and reflective learning sessions. Newly appointed staff benefit from a rigorous induction. Staff have access to a wide variety of training appropriate to their role, and the training is reflective of the needs of the children and young people that their foster carers support. Staff and foster carers may train together, and all talk positively about the value of this. Staff are encouraged to develop professionally, exploring areas of personal interest that will also support the development of the agency.

Leaders and managers make good use of the data recording systems to inform their structured oversight. The weekly, monthly and quarterly monitoring discussions serve to highlight what is working well and those areas that require additional input. This also informs the agency development plan.

The quality of professional relationships with all stakeholders is a real strength of the agency. Commissioners, in particular, are very complimentary about the agency's

engagement and the flexible approaches taken. A professional described 'effective partnership working that enables and supports learning'. Other comments included 'they provide the best value for the best match'; 'transparent in their dealings and flexible in support and managing breakdowns'; and 'one of the few providers that have retained a local identity'. The agency does provide challenge when needed, but this is rare due to the open and honest working relationships.

There are management leads for marketing, recruitment and assessment. The three leads share information and work effectively together to increase the pool of foster carers. They have excellent data monitoring that enables the teams to track all the systems and processes and use this information to inform practice. The leads are aware that the diversity of their foster carers is limited in comparison to the diversity of the children who they provide care for, and they are striving to address this.

The agency predominantly uses independent assessors. The assessments are variable in quality. Many are strong, with clear analysis and evaluation, while a minority are weaker and overly descriptive. The agency has a central panel list and members specify which of the three offices across the area they would prefer. This effectively provides three panels across the agency. Members quality assure in respect of each assessment and give annual reviews through the panel, but there is no overview report. This approach misses an opportunity to inform agency development and learning from analysis and evaluation of reports presented to panel. Panel minutes also vary in quality, as some are very robust while others lack clarity and do not provide sufficient evidence of challenge.

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: SC465949

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