

Compass Fostering East Limited

Exhibit House, Dunmow Road, Felsted, Dunmow, Essex CM6 3LD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Compass Fostering is an independent fostering agency that has seven registered offices throughout England. Compass Fostering East includes carers from the acquisition of Fostering People Too. The office base is in Essex. This registration recruits and supports foster carers from local authorities including Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Bedfordshire. At the time of this inspection, Compass Fostering East had 82 approved foster carers caring for 93 children.

Inspection dates: 29 October to 2 November 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 21 September 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children experience good-quality care from caring and committed carers.
- Children's self-confidence and self-esteem improve from their starting point.
- Children develop new skills and benefit from a variety of positive experiences.
- The vast majority of children attend education, thrive, and achieve well.
- Changes in the management, leadership and staffing of the service have not affected the quality of children's experiences.
- Senior leaders continue to take proactive steps to address the impact of recent change.
- Senior leaders meet with carers to listen to how the service can be improved for children.
- The team of supervising social workers is motivated to ensure that children's needs remain central to day-to-day activity across the service.
- The agency fostering panel is very experienced and competent in exercising good professional curiosity.
- The recently appointed manager is working positively with colleagues and is taking positive steps to involve children and their carers in the development of the service.
- This registration benefits from the experience and infrastructure of the wider organisation.
- The responsible individual is effective. She responds well to ensure that resources, including staff, are available to meet the needs of the children and their carers.
- Local authority social workers and commissioning teams provided positive feedback about the progress that their child makes in placement.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The agency's approach to reviewing the majority of risk assessments and demonstrating how these assessments are discussed with carers is not sufficiently consistent.
- Initial assessments of prospective carers require more detail to demonstrate the assessing worker's analysis of how the applicants intend to meet the needs of the range of children as outlined in each recommendation for approval.
- The agency fostering panel is not sufficiently diverse.
- Some internal quality assurance processes have slipped.
- Information held in the children's records does not consistently demonstrate how progress is captured.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (National Minimum Standards 4.5)

In particular, ensure that individual safer-care plans are consistently reviewed and discussed with carers, for example during supervision.

- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker need in order to make an objective approval decision. (National Minimum Standard 13.7)

In particular, detail in the assessment report how the prospective carers meet the considered terms of approval.

- Ensure that the central list of panel members is sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and the carers that the service caters for. (National Minimum Standards 14.8)

In particular, ensure that membership of the panel is sufficiently diverse.

- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify and concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National Minimum Standards 25.2)

- 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 are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (National Minimum Standards 26.6)

In particular, ensure that there is consistent use of the chosen method to capture children's progress and achievements.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The vast majority of children make good and meaningful progress from their starting points. They experience acceptance from their foster families and develop positive, important and, in some circumstances, enduring relationships with their carers and their carers' extended families. One child said, 'Of all of the places that I have lived away from my family, I have to admit that this is the best. The carers know how to support me.'

The ethos of Compass Fostering places emphasis on providing holistic childcare. Literature about the agency encourages carers to work positively to promote and inspire resilience in children. The model helps to set the scene for care provision and ensures that new and experienced carers develop and build a range of skills to equip children for life.

Children have busy and productive lives. For example, they benefit from taking part in a range of after-school and weekend activities including sport and fitness. Children gain from new positive experiences, such as holidays and becoming part of their local community. The agency is good at celebrating children's individual accomplishments and issues personalised certificates to recognise success. The agency has developed resources to help carers and supervising social workers to routinely capture achievements. Nonetheless, some of the sampled children's records show that there is an inconsistent approach to coordinating information in ways that is helpful to children should they wish to access their files now or in the future.

Two young people are staying put. Over 95% of children are aged over five years. The majority of children who should be are in full-time education, which helps to ensure that children have a good chance of reaching their academic potential. The work of the bespoke national education team is currently being introduced through carer training and support groups. This resource offers advice and guidance to help carers and supervising social workers to advocate for children, for example when children are excluded from school.

Carers understand the complexity of family relationships. Many carers go above and beyond to ensure that children have space to speak about their feelings and spend time with their birth parents, extended families and brothers and sisters in line with local authority planning. This helps children to retain their identity and creates opportunity for children to make sense of their experiences.

Children receive good emotional support that helps to improve their well-being. The agency uses a team of therapeutic practitioners that offers professional guidance and one-to-one sessions to carers. This helps carers to understand trauma and helps to identify individual children who may be demonstrating more extreme behaviours and signpost them to additional external psychological support.

Pre-approval training prepares prospective carers to explore in more depth the role and responsibilities of a foster carer. Initial assessments and background checks of prospective carers are sufficiently rigorous. Initial assessments sampled show a good balance between social workers' description and analysis of the applicant's motivation to foster. Nonetheless, further analysis of the recommended range of approval helps to ensure that the assessing worker has considered the applicant's potential capacity to parent more than one child.

The agency works positively and proactively with other professionals. Placing local authorities largely provide good feedback about their children's experiences. Overall, children are well matched. This helps to ensure that children and their carers have good experiences in the early stages of placement. When issues in placement arise, the agency is frequently good at liaising and communicating with foster carers and placing authorities to find child-centred solutions. Some carers have vacancies, which demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that placements are well considered and thus more likely to succeed. Supervising social workers are actively involved in decisions about matching. This helps to ensure that the needs of all children living in the household are taken into consideration before children are placed.

Foster carers' annual reviews and children's events at the office base and in the wider community help to ensure that children have a voice and develop an understanding of the agency's commitment to their well-being. An organisational participation strategy that is currently being embedded helps to promote the organisation's expectation that children are involved in developing this service.

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

There are few high-risk incidents such as children going missing, child exploitation and radicalisation. However, the agency has an internal mechanism to raise the profile and capture information about individual children whose behaviour is causing significant concern. This ensures a spotlight on high-risk behaviours and enables the agency to rally support and resources from other agencies, which helps those children to become increasingly safe and access additional services.

Unannounced visits take place and carers receive supervision. Individual safer-care plans are structured to help foster carers and their allocated supervising social worker to capture information about children's behavioural profiles and what this could mean for day-to-day family life, for example how to show affection appropriately between the carer and the child. However, the content of sampled individual safer-care plans varies in quality. Information is not consistently reviewed with the carers. This practice leads to misunderstandings, has the potential to leave carers vulnerable to allegation and does not demonstrate that the agency takes a consistently proportionate approach to risk.

The foster panel is established and there have been few changes in membership, although the former registered manager sits as an independent member. The established panel provides stability and continuity for some carers. The panel members are extremely experienced and knowledgeable in fostering matters. The panel makes strong and positive recommendations to the provider and offers

excellent oversight about the quality of the assessments. Nonetheless, membership lacks sufficient diversity and this limits inclusion.

The geographical locations of carer support groups are improving. This encourages more carers to attend meetings and to benefit from the support and insight offered from more experienced carers and supervising social workers.

Restrictive physical interventions are infrequent. The agency promotes the ethos that foster carers see beyond the immediate challenges of behaviour. Carers are encouraged to communicate effectively and to explore emotions with children. A child said, 'My foster carer helps me to talk about my big feelings, and that has helped me to feel less angry.'

Carers complete the required training standards. In addition, this agency offers an extensive package of training and support on topics such as attachment, paediatric first aid and mental health. This helps carers to develop and improve their knowledge in areas that are helpful to children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There has been much change in this registration since the last inspection. In August 2017, Fostering People Too was acquired by Compass Fostering. The agency changed its name to Compass Fostering East in April 2018. Following the acquisition, changes in leadership and management combined with staff leaving resulted in a period of instability. Nonetheless, working proactively to address the impact of the purchase of Fostering People Too and the expansion of the geographical spread of the service, the senior leadership team continues to find solutions to minimise the impact on the children. Senior managers and managers who have sound experience in working in fostering are currently deployed to work at the office base. Those managers have developed a competent understanding of children's well-being and their circumstances. Overall, this helps to ensure that children's experiences remain central to day-to-day operations.

Since the beginning of 2018, the number of carers and children looked after has increased significantly. Even so, the senior leaders in Compass have a clear focus on supporting children and listening to foster carers. The senior managers coordinate internal resources to ensure that placement matching and placement stability remain the focus of operations. The figures show that the change in ownership has minimal impact for the children, with 60% of all children having been living with their carers for over one year and 26% for over three years.

Some quality assurance processes have slipped. Despite the structure being available, the auditing of the carers' and children's files does not happen regularly enough. This means that supervising social workers and foster carers do not routinely receive feedback about their written reports.

The registered manager, who was recruited because of the acquisition, became ill and resigned in September 2018. The current manager, who is experienced in fostering, started in post shortly before this inspection. He is already making a

positive difference. He is proactively meeting with carers, and he invited a child who is looked after to sit on a staff interview panel. The manager has applied to register with Ofsted.

The service now has a team of permanent supervising social workers. All of the supervising social workers have relevant previous experience in working with children in care and safeguarding. Since the last inspection, at times, staff members' one-to-one supervision was lacking; however, this has changed. The new manager is meeting with staff, talking to them about their allocated carer households and learning about and responding to the children's placement support needs.

The carer ambassador scheme is embedding. This provides a defined structure for senior managers to communicate routinely, meet with and receive feedback from the wider carer group. Overall, there is growing confidence in the leadership team. A carer said, 'The changes have been unsettling and I had been thinking of leaving, but I have changed my mind because things are changing.'

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: SC064986

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Registered provider address: Mountfields House, Off Squirrel Way, Epinal Way,
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Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspectors

Rosie Davie: social care inspector

Brenda McInerney: social care inspector



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