

Compass Fostering North Limited

Hope Park Business Centre, Hope Park, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD5 8HH

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency has been registered since 2010. The service operates from a registered office in West Yorkshire, with local offices in Bradford, Bolton and Newton Aycliffe. The agency offers a range of foster placements, including respite, permanent, long term, short term, and parent and child arrangements. At the time of this visit, the agency had 300 fostering households who are caring for 363 children and young people.

The manager has been registered since October 2020. He has extensive experience of working for and managing an independent fostering agency. He is suitably qualified for the role.

Visit dates: 18 to 19 November 2020

Previous inspection date: 19 March 2018

Previous inspection judgement: Good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred

practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

The agency has continued to recruit foster carers who provide a high number of family homes to children. Children spoken to said their foster carers treat them like their own children which makes them feel part of the family.

The children are carefully matched with their foster carers. The agency's staff know the carers well and foster carers are involved in the matching process. Whenever possible, children's views are sought, and they receive a family book which provides information about their new carers in advance of any move. Children experience stability, starting with positive beginnings, and there are fewer unplanned endings.

Foster carers feel supported by their supervising social workers. Although face-to-face supervision was not possible during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, foster carers report that they received the same high standard of support. This includes an out-of-hours service which provides foster carers with 24-hour support. One foster carer reported, 'We enjoy a very positive relationship with our supervising social worker. She is supportive when things get difficult. She is a person we trust to help us do the best we can for children in our care.'

Some children were not able to attend school or college during the pandemic lockdown. The agency's education team provides foster carers with ideas and resources for home educating the children. The agency also uses experienced foster carers as education ambassadors. Staff challenge placing authorities and advocate on behalf of the children. Children benefit from this support to maintain stability in their educational progress.

During the pandemic, the agency has been unable to provide social events for the children. However, foster carers have received extra money to help fund activities for the children. The agency also ran weekly competitions during the lockdown, including a cooking and dining experience and a do-it-yourself project. As the restrictions lifted, some foster carers formed support bubbles with other carers and met in parks and play areas. This enabled children to both form and maintain friendships.

When children's face-to-face family time was not possible due to the pandemic restrictions, foster carers continued to promote children's relationships with their birth families. Children adapted to speaking to their family members using video conferencing, and when it was safe to meet, any family-time plans were carefully risk assessed.

The safety of children

The manager's enhanced quality assurance process includes checking the foster carers' reports before their presentation to the fostering panel. This makes sure that each report is of a good standard and that all the necessary safeguarding checks are completed.

The dedicated fostering panel members have continued with their panel business during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, and always meets with the usual quoracy levels. These meetings now take place through video conferencing. The panel process is thorough. The panel chairperson and members demonstrate professional curiosity. There is comprehensive consideration of the foster carers' positive attributes and any vulnerabilities.

The administration of the panel is efficient and the minutes are detailed. This helps the agency's decision maker to make well-evidenced decisions about the safe approval of foster carers.

Children's safer care plans include information about changes in household routines due to the pandemic, such as increased handwashing or the use of hand sanitiser. More vulnerable children, such as those who go missing from home, have individualised risk assessments which inform the agency and foster carers about how to keep them safe. The agency staff and foster carers work closely with safeguarding agencies and agree strategies for the foster carers to use. This multi-agency working helps to keep children safe.

Some foster carers look after children with very complex health needs and disabilities. They are extra vigilant and cautious as a result of the pandemic. The carers work closely with health professionals and have the necessary skills to provide a high level of care. This includes knowing how to respond in an emergency.

The agency's close monitoring of significant events means that good support and oversight are provided as needed. The agency notifies Ofsted of these incidents. However, managers do not always notify the regulator of the outcome of their investigations.

Leaders and managers

The manager is child focused and has a strong commitment to children's participation in the agency. This includes an adult care leaver being involved with the fostering panel. Children take part in the 'Make a Change' children's council. One child said, 'We want every foster child to have a say to improve the company.'

Leaders and the manager are making positive changes to the agency. The staff are consulted regularly and now benefit from better career opportunities. This is resulting in improved recruitment and retention of staff.

A comprehensive and wide-ranging programme of training helps to ensure that staff and foster carers are appropriately trained and skilled. Staff speak highly about the quality and variety of their training, which includes specialist training, such as about diabetes.

The foster carers say that they feel well supported and that they are kept informed of developments in the agency. They enjoy the local support groups led by their foster carer representatives as well as smaller, informal groups. Foster carer ambassadors offer additional support and mentoring, particularly to newer foster carers. One carer said, 'Compass is a very supportive agency. This is evidenced through the ambassador roles that carers can take on in which they buddy up with new carers and act as a friendly presence.'

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that a written record is kept which includes details of the action taken, and the outcome of any action or investigation, following a notifiable incident. In particular, ensure that an update notification is sent to the regulator. (National minimum standard 29.2)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC405567

Registered provider: Compass Fostering North Limited

Registered provider address: Mountfields House, Epinal Way, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3GE

Responsible individual: Kathryn Swift

Registered manager: Dean Howson

Inspectors

Tina Ruffles, Social Care Inspector
Neil Penswick, Her Majesty's Inspector

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