

Compass Fostering Central Ltd

Mountfields House, Epinal Way, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3GE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Compass Fostering Central Limited is an independent fostering agency based in Loughborough, Leicestershire. The agency was established in 2005.

The agency offers a wide range of fostering placements, including emergency, respite, short-term, long-term and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, it had 252 fostering households and 312 children in placement.

The registered manager has been registered since 2020.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 May 2021

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 June 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children form positive attachments to their carers and make progress. They feel welcomed into the fostering household and part of the fostering family. Several older children have remained living with their former foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements. This includes a young person with a life-limiting condition. This reflects their sense of belonging and desire to remain beyond their 18th birthdays.

Children have a voice in the care and support they receive. The agency actively promotes their full engagement and seeks their wishes, views and feelings. This is done through a range of activities and consultation events. There is a commendable commitment to seeking input from all children in the fostering household, including carers' own children. Children know how to make a complaint or raise any concerns they may have. The registered manager takes all such feedback seriously and responds in a timely manner.

All children placed with the agency have education, employment or training in place. Agency staff and carers receive support from a dedicated education support service within the organisation. Suitably qualified staff in this service provide support, training and guidance to ensure children's educational needs are met. A child recently permanently excluded from school was found another potential education provision by the agency within 24 hours of their exclusion. Additional support was provided to the carers to support the child during the exclusion. Such responsive services provide children with the opportunity to learn and make progress.

Children take part in a wide range of fun activities. Despite the limitations over the past year due to COVID-19, carers and agency staff have made sure children still have opportunities to socialise and try out new things. A child said about their carers: 'They play games with us, do drawing and colouring, go walking and they talk with us and answer questions.' The agency provided additional financial support to carers over the past year to support them with social activities for children during lockdowns. The education service also provided additional support to carers and children in relation to home schooling and its challenges.

Health needs of children are understood and met by carers, with agency staff support. Children's routine and more specialist health needs receive prompt attention and support. This can also include the involvement of the organisation's therapeutic staff. Some children have complex physical health needs and issues. They receive specialist support and their carers also receive additional training to enable them to confidently meet those needs. Supervising social workers have been matched with carers based on their expertise and skills. This provides children with competent and confident carers, supported by equally competent and confident fostering workers.

Where placements are at risk, the agency has developed a range of innovative approaches to support children and carers. Other approved carers are used to provide practical and emotional support to children and carers. This is leading to a

reduction in placement breakdowns and provides a local and flexible support package at times of need.

Some foster carers' records did not present a clear or positive account of children's experiences of living with their foster families. The use of inappropriate language or limited information is not always sensitive to children's needs and does not provide a clear sense of what their experiences were like.

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

Children feel safe and are kept safe in their foster homes. Foster carers understand their responsibilities to protect children in their care. Over time, there has been a reduction in children's concerning or risky behaviours. Children report a strong sense of their carers keeping them safe and happy. There have been very few reported incidents of children going missing from care. Responses on such occasions have been positive and reflect carers' competence.

The agency closely monitors and tracks any children deemed to be at risk due to health or social/emotional needs. A 'high risk register' is in place and considered by managers at their weekly meetings. Managers consider each child and put in place clear plans and actions to reduce the concerns. This is proving to be an effective means of supporting both children and their carers at times of need.

The statement of purpose for the agency states it will carry out two unannounced home visits to approved carers each year. This has not been achieved, but improvements have been made in recent months. It is a legal requirement for at least one unannounced visit to be made each year. The agency is going to consider its ability to carry out two visits, given recent changes to staff and capacity.

Robust and careful recruitment procedures for agency staff and prospective carers prevent children from being placed at harm. All necessary checks are undertaken prior to the approval of carers or appointment of agency staff.

A range of child-specific risk assessments and individual safer caring plans provide carers with a clear sense of the risks posed to and from children in their care. The agency has recently devised new formats, which are written in a child-friendly manner. This will enable children to be much more included in identifying and working on their known and potential risks.

Allegations about carers are responded to in a timely manner by managers. They follow national guidance and protocols. They report concerns to the designated officer and work with placing authorities to investigate concerns thoroughly. Careful consideration is given to the need to remove a child from the fostering household and the impact this will have on them. Carers feel well supported during the investigation process and have access to independent professional support via the agency.

The inspection identified concerns in relation to the lack of carers' records for one

placement. The carers have failed to record their daily/weekly logs for children placed with them for some considerable time. Managers are aware of this practice concern but have not resolved it in a timely manner. There has been no apparent adverse impact on the children, who are reported to be doing well and making progress. The lack of recording could, however, present potential safeguarding concerns.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is dedicated to ensuring positive outcomes and experiences for children placed with the agency. In a relatively short period of time, she has introduced changes to supervising social workers' caseloads. This has reduced the amount of time they spend travelling to visit carers and has been well received by most staff and carers.

Staff and carers feel well supported by the registered and operational managers. They feel listened to and that their views are valued. Foster carers can take on additional roles as representatives and/or ambassadors. This enables them to use their additional skills to support the agency and other carers. Such additional roles include those in education, equality and diversity. Carers attend regional and national groups and receive additional payment. This adds to their sense of being part of the organisation and in influencing how the agency operates. As one carer said: 'I feel able to contact all managers in the region, even senior ones, and that there is an open-door policy. This is what has kept me working for this agency for so long.'

There is an extensive and very comprehensive range of learning and development opportunities for foster carers. Agency staff can also access the same training options. Managers closely monitor carers as they complete the required training, support and development standards within the first year of their approval. Some carers have completed their level 3 diplomas. Agency staff are supported and encouraged to complete management and practice educator training. This undoubtedly increases their sense of being valued, as well as their skills. Agency staff and carers receive regular and good-quality formal supervision.

Both the registered and operational managers have an extensive range of monitoring and tracking systems. They run reports, consider any areas of concern and regularly meet to formulate and monitor action plans. They demonstrate a detailed knowledge of both children and carers and their presenting needs. They take prompt action to support any placements which may be at risk of breaking down. They regularly celebrate the achievements of children and their carers.

A recent assessment of a potential foster carer did not consider or assess the support person identified by the applicant. Such assessment is an important aspect of considering the ability of carers to meet children's needs, as well as their own. This is not in line with the agency's statement of purpose and led to a recommendation on approval having to be deferred at the fostering panel.

The fostering panel consists of a wide range of suitably skilled and experienced

members. The minutes of meetings do not, however, accurately reflect the comments made by each panel member when considering their recommendations for new or continued approval of carers. Minutes, similarly, do not reflect the terms of approval for prospective carers and those carers coming to panel for their first annual review.

One set of approved carers resigned prior to their annual review. The intention was to take the matter back to panel to consider their ongoing suitability. This did not take place, as the carers' resignation came into effect before the planned panel date. This would have provided panel, the agency decision-maker and the agency with the chance to consider if they would have continued approval of those carers.

The two requirements set at the last inspection have been fully considered and responded to. The recommendation from the last inspection relating to panel minutes has been restated.

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>Subject to paragraph (6), the fostering service provider must ensure that the fostering service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 3 (5))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that assessments are carried out of identified support persons for prospective and approved foster carers. It also relates to ensuring that the stated number of unannounced visits to foster carers are undertaken each year.</p>	30 July 2021

Recommendations

- Fostering panel minutes should clearly state matters discussed and individual panel member's views and recommendations. ('The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 4: Fostering Services', page 43, paragraph 5.25)
- When considering applications for approval, the panel should recommend on what terms applicants should be approved (e.g. number and age of children to be placed) and to clearly state if the terms of approval remain appropriate at the first review of approved carers. ('The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 4: Fostering Services', page 38, paragraph 5.3)
- Upon the resignation of a foster carer, the fostering service should form a view about the person's future suitability to be a foster carer, had they not resigned. ('The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 4: Fostering Services', page 50, paragraph 5.59)
- The registered person should ensure that information about a 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. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 52, paragraph 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that any areas of concern relating to a foster carer are considered and dealt with at the time they arise. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 29, paragraph 13.9)

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: SC065772

Registered provider: Compass Fostering Central Limited

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

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Inspectors

Tracy Murty, Social Care Inspector
Cathey Moriarty, Social Care Inspector

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