

# Compass Fostering North Limited

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

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Compass Fostering North Limited is a privately run company in England. This is one of seven independent fostering agencies in England. It provides short-term, emergency, long-term, respite, permanent, and sibling group fostering homes. As an agency, it also offers placements for children with specific care needs, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, parent and child, step down, and children with disabilities and additional needs.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 280 approved fostering households and 351 children placed with its foster carers.

Compass Fostering North Limited is spread across three different offices with their own operations managers and one registered manager overseeing them.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting on 20 November 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

### Inspection dates: 31 January to 4 February 2022

**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:** 19 March 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Children experience stability and have a sense of permanence. Staying put arrangements ensure that, when children reach the age of 18, they can remain with their foster family. Special guardianship orders and adoption are encouraged to further enhance this stability. Children have strong, trusting relationships with carers and have positive experiences.

The voice of the child is heard and valued. The agency advocates for this and a children's council provides children with the opportunity to share their views. These views are listened to and acted on, improving the children's lives as well as how the agency operates. For example, a recent mock panel helped children to understand the assessment process, as well as providing the agency with additional questions to use which match what the children think is important to them.

Education is a focus for the agency, and it understands its role to ensure that children have the education and skills they need. Educational leads and ambassadors provide support and information to supervising social workers and foster carers. This empowers them to request what children need to support their education and challenge when this is not in place.

Children make progress and achieve well at school. Children continue to learn and develop post 16, with all but one in some form of learning or employment. During school closures as a result of COVID-19, support was put in place quickly to ensure that carers had the support and equipment needed to educate the children. This minimised disruptions to learning.

Children have opportunities to explore their talents and interests, trying new things and having new experiences. This includes learning to ride a bike and swimming, as well as learning to live independently. Children develop in ability and confidence as a result of these opportunities.

Carers support children to have positive relationships with family members and those people who are important to them, when appropriate. Carers build positive links with birth families and will travel to ensure that children can see family. This maintains relationships and also supports children to return home in line with their care plans.

Children's health needs, including emotional health, are known and clear plans are in place to support them. Carers receive additional support from therapists, who also undertake assessments with children to identify the support they need. The agency holds the local authority accountable if they decline the intervention to ensure that the children's needs are still met.

The agency has a clear focus on matching children's needs with the foster carers' skillset. Foster carers are involved in this process and children are then introduced. Children receive information about the foster home to help them feel prepared. The

matching forms clearly identify the children's risks and how the match is suitable, including when children may be placed further away from home or when they are returning to live with carers. This helps to identify any additional support or consideration to ensure that this is put in place.

Foster carers are approved with a standard approval. This does not recognise the space available in a foster carer's home or their skillset. However, clear systems are in place to ensure that these needs are known and that all involved in family finding are aware.

If children's placements become vulnerable to breaking down, the agency identifies this and is proactive in putting plans in place, including working closely with both external and internal professionals. This prevents an immediate breakdown and provides time to implement the changes needed or, in some cases, allows for a planned move in a positive way.

Extensive information is given at the different stages to new foster carers. Information is easy to understand and breaks down barriers by avoiding jargon and explaining professional language. The agency looks for ways to support carers to meet the requirements needed. This is helping to increase the diversity of the carers.

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

Children have strong relationships with their carers, which enables them to share and disclose information. Carers respond sensitively to this and ensure children have the support they need. Children's risks are also reducing due to these positive relationships.

Risk assessments are detailed and kept up to date. They are easy to understand and recognise current risks. An additional support plan captures the child's voice and gives further clarity on how to help them. Carers have the guidance and information they need to reduce risk and better protect children.

The number of children who are repeatedly missing from home is low. When children do go missing, carers are clear about their responsibilities. The agency works proactively with other safeguarding professionals to ensure that the right support is accessed, such as criminal and sexual exploitation assessments which identify further risks and how to minimise these. Work takes place with the children to understand the reasons why they are missing and to give them information to keep safe, including return home interviews from the agency and the local authority.

Allegations are responded to quickly and relevant professionals are updated. The agency works well with the local authority designated officer to ensure that thorough investigations keep children safe. The staff who work at the agency show professional curiosity, identifying potential recurring themes in children's disclosures or concerns and act on this. Training and support is put in place for foster carers to improve standards. If needed, foster carers' reviews are brought forward and, where

necessary, their registration ended. This helps to ensure that children only live with people who are safe to care for them.

Bullying and discrimination are not tolerated by the agency. Any instances where there is an indication of this are addressed immediately. The agency has implemented anti-discriminatory forums and provides training for all staff to further enhance understanding and to promote consistent responses. Children also receive support to understand why bullying is not accepted. For example, sharing children's experiences with others helps everyone understand the impact of bullying.

Incidents are well recorded and shared by foster carers with the agency and other professionals. If any delays in reporting are identified, these are addressed with individual carers to ensure they understand their responsibilities about sharing information in a timely way. This ensures that action is taken to support the child and that safety plans are put in place if needed.

Any safeguarding concerns are responded to and escalated quickly. Information within DBS checks are thoroughly explored and kept under review. Yearly checks by the agency ensure that any new concerns can be explored. This helps prevent unsuitable people from working with or spending time with children.

Restraints are rare and in line with guidance. If restraints are to be used to help keep the child safe, they are identified as part of the matching process, but also put in place as and when they are needed. The agency has a strong focus on de-escalation. Any holds that are not approved are escalated and investigated as an allegation or complaint. Foster carers are held accountable as to any reason for holds and children are not held unless this is unavoidable, preventing further trauma to the child.

Parent and child foster carers understand their responsibilities and the importance of providing good recording for court assessments. They are confident in raising concerns and attend court hearings. They provide a strong focus on the safety of children.

Carers' homes meet health and safety requirements. Safer care plans are in place for all households and are regularly reviewed and updated. Pets are risk assessed and taken into consideration when matching. Unannounced visits take place, often more than once. Additional visits are undertaken by supervising social workers to see the child if they are not present, to ensure their voice is heard and that the child is seen. This reduces the risk of unsafe practice or environments.

Recruitment of new foster carers is thorough. The necessary checks are completed, and time is taken to ensure that all information is gathered, and issues revisited if necessary. Potential carers are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and the importance of sharing accurate information. This enables the agency to make informed decisions as to the suitability of new carers.

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

The manager was registered with Ofsted in November 2020. He is child focused and expects staff to meet minimum standards with a drive to exceed these.

The manager has identified shortfalls and put plans in place to address these. These plans are kept under review to ensure they are current, making changes as needed. During the inspection, the manager was receptive to feedback and quick to respond.

Although there has been a high turnover of supervising social workers, most foster carers feel well supported and have been kept well informed. One new foster carer experienced a delay in being appointed a supervising social worker. However, the manager recognised this and has put plans in place to prevent this reoccurring. This improves the foster carers' initial experience and the support available to them.

Supervising social workers feel supported and share that they are listened to and their views acted on. Staff have opportunities to develop which is motivating them to work with the manager to achieve his overall aims for the agency. This gives staff a chance to develop further while sharing good practice with each other.

Recruitment of supervising social workers and panel members is thorough, with references and checks being followed prior to appointment. This helps to ensure that those working for the agency do not pose a risk to others.

Numerous training opportunities are available, underpinned by the agency's anti-discriminatory and therapeutic ethos. A blend of face-to-face and virtual training ensures that staff and foster carers have the skills to meet the needs of the children.

The manager has developed strong links with internal education and therapeutic teams. The manager has a strong understanding of the support they can offer. There is a culture of empowering staff and carers to access the resources and support available. This is continuing to improve outcomes for children.

The agency staff receive regular supervision. Social workers discuss each family in detail enabling full oversight from managers. Reflective practice discussions help to improve learning and identify alternative ways of working to support children and their carers.

Panel is diverse and led by an independent chair who has a positive relationship with the agency. The panel members are clear about their role and involved in the development within the agency. Records are detailed and minutes capture the discussions that have taken place. Assessments are of a good quality and provide the panel with the information it needs. Panel members are curious and explore any potential issues or ask for clarity. Children's well-being and safeguarding practice are at the centre of their decision-making.

The manager has strong systems in place to ensure that he has good oversight of all three offices. Guidance is given to operational managers in each of the offices to ensure that there is a consistent approach to monitoring and checking documents

and staff practice. This enables the manager to have full oversight, in addition to working at the different offices throughout the week.

Children's records do not consistently provide a detailed account of their day-to-day experiences and the majority are not child friendly. This does not support children to have a good understanding of their living history. This is not always known or addressed with the foster carers to improve their practice. The manager is aware that this is an area for development and staff have undertaken training to improve the quality of their records.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should 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. (National Minimum Standards 26.6)

### **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:** SC405567

**Registered provider:** Compass Fostering North Limited

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## **Inspectors**

Debra Boldy, Social Care Inspector

Jacqueline Malcolm, Social Care Inspector

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