

# Compass Fostering East

Compass Fostering East Limited

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

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency is part of a large national company that recruits, assesses, approves, trains and supports foster carers.

The provider registered an eastern branch in March 2021. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 102 fostering households and 99 children living with foster carers. The agency provides a wide range of foster care arrangements, including parent and child.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 21 July 2022

### Inspection dates: 25 to 29 July 2022

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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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:** not applicable

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** not applicable

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** not applicable

## Inspection judgements

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

Children are carefully matched with foster carers who can meet their needs. Most children are settled in their fostering households and enjoy a sense of belonging. The agency offers homes that enable children to live with their brothers and sisters and for children to remain with their parents. Foster carers encourage relationships that are important to the children they care for. Children benefit from spending time with their family and friends in the fostering household when possible.

Foster carers and supervising social workers are strong advocates for children. Children are helped to share their wishes and feelings with other professionals, including speaking directly to the family court judge. The agency has a clear participation strategy that involves children in developments at the agency. Children are currently reviewing the children's guide to fostering and choosing questions to ask applicants who want to be foster carers.

Children's attendance and attainment in education are high. Most children are making good progress. Foster carers ensure that children's experience at school is positive. When needed, foster carers support children to move to the right education provision. Agency education coordinators help supervising social workers and foster carers to challenge any delay in children accessing education or the additional resources that they need.

Foster carers make sure that children have opportunities to try new hobbies and find new interests. Children regularly attend after-school clubs and spend time with their friends. This helps children to learn new skills and to develop their social skills. Foster carers and the agency recognise and celebrate children's individual achievements with certificates, rewards and praise. This helps to build children's self-esteem.

Foster carers support children to gain the independence skills that they will need as adults. This includes using public transport alone, managing their own medical appointments and medication and accessing part-time work. Children can remain with their foster carers after the age of 18 in staying put arrangements. This allows them to move on to adulthood at a pace that is right for them.

Foster carers have a good understanding of children's physical and emotional health needs. Foster carers ensure that children have access to the specialist mental health services that they need. This includes supporting children to manage self-harming behaviours. Foster carers are guided by the agency therapists to help them recognise and respond sensitively to children's past trauma.

Foster carers are considerate of children's individual identity needs and demonstrate acceptance. Foster carers help children to understand and challenge discrimination.

Foster carers' records provide a good overview of children's experiences. There are examples of excellent foster carers' records written in age-appropriate and respectful ways directly to children. These are accessible to children to read now and in the future. Children are provided with information about fostering and their fostering household before they move in. However, foster carers' profiles vary in quality, and information contained in the children's guide is not available in a format appropriate for parents moving in with their child.

Most foster carers feel valued and well supported. Foster carers' feedback includes:

- 'We can't speak highly enough of the agency.'
- 'Our supervising social worker is fantastic.'
- 'We value their [staff's] expertise.'
- 'They have the children and our best interests at heart.'

Due to changes of the supervising social workers, some foster carers have felt that support has been inconsistent at times. Some foster carers said that central functions such as the payment systems and access to policies need improving. Managers are aware of these issues through foster carer consultation and are taking steps to improve them.

Foster carers receive regular support from their supervising social worker. Additional support is provided when needed, including regular support groups and out of usual office hours. The agency has strengthened foster carer support networks with the introduction of foster carer ambassadors, who offer guidance and advice through the assessment process at the point of welcoming a child into the home and completing the induction process. The agency has a strong focus on preparing and supporting birth children through their fostering journey.

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

Foster carers develop trusting relationships with children that enable children to share their worries. Foster carers escalate concerns to appropriate professionals. Managers have developed clear guidance for foster carers on recording and reporting on incidents to ensure that this happens promptly.

Children's risk management plans are detailed and provide good guidance for foster carers to understand and reduce risks to children. This includes managing the risk of online abuse and child exploitation. However, some plans do not adequately cover the risks of children administering their own medication or the safe storage of medication in the home. Safer caring plans are completed for all households. However, these do not always identify the presenting risks to be managed in the household.

Children are involved in writing their own safety plans. This enables them to discuss and learn about what keeps them safe with the adults who are caring for them.

When children go missing from home, foster carers respond quickly. Managers ensure that multi-agency meetings take place to discuss the risk with relevant professionals. If important meetings are delayed, managers escalate this appropriately with the local authority.

Foster carers are provided with training on de-escalation to enable them to help children manage their emotions. Additional personalised training is available to provide support with specific challenges. All incidents of foster carers holding children are reviewed by a manager and referred to the local authority designated officer if needed.

Agency staff receive regular supervision. For supervising social workers, this includes effective case management. The manager has established systems for monitoring risk and the stability of children's arrangements. This ensures that management support and challenge is provided when needed.

Allegations against carers are managed well. Internal investigations are detailed and carried out by an independent person if needed. When concerns or lessons learned are identified, foster carers return to panel for further exploration of their ongoing suitability.

The assessment and review of foster carers is thorough. Fostering panel and independent reviewing officers provide the agency decision-maker with clear recommendations. Any gaps in information are highlighted and set as actions for the agency. However, these actions are not always captured or evidenced as complete.

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

A newly registered manager has been appointed from within the organisation. This change has been managed well with minimal disruption to staff and foster carers. As an internal appointment, the manager has a comprehensive understanding of the agency's strengths and areas of improvement. The manager is child centred with a detailed oversight of children's care plans.

Managers have a good knowledge of the issues affecting carers, including the changes of supervising social workers. A recruitment and retention policy is in place and the introduction of foster carer ambassadors has been implemented to offer foster carers increased consistency of support from a wider network.

Managers have high expectations of staff's and foster carers' practice. Consequently, staff practice that falls short is addressed formally. Any standards of care issues relating to foster carers are explored openly with the child's social worker. Managers ensure that additional resources and increased management intervention is provided to help resolve any concerns.

Fostering panel is diverse in experience, this includes inclusion of a care experienced adult and foster carer. Fostering panel provides effective scrutiny and an effective

quality assurance function for the agency. The panel chair uses feedback from applicants to continuously improve their practice.

Managers ensure that lessons are learned from incidents and unplanned endings. This learning informs training for foster carers and supervising social workers to continually improve matching decisions.

The agency offers a range of relevant training to foster carers. To increase attendance, managers have ensured that training is available at different times and venues and that transport is provided as required. Foster carers providing support to parent-and-child arrangements have accessed training focused on the expectations of this specific role. However, not all foster carers have completed the foster carer mandatory induction standards within the required timescale and some households have not completed first-aid training.

Managers have formed positive relationships with placing local authorities. Senior managers are working with commissioners with the aim of offering more children foster care in their communities.

Leaders are committed to continuous improvement. They are embedding several new initiatives including a refreshed approach to anti-discriminatory practice and quality assurance. The agency is ready to launch a bespoke information technology recording system to reduce duplication and the burden of completing paperwork across the organisation.

# 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>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>In particular, the registered provider should ensure that foster carers attend the training that the agency has identified as mandatory, including first aid and induction training.</p>	1 November 2022

## Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted in all fostering placements. In particular, the provider should ensure that children self-administering their own medication is adequately risk assessed and that household safer caring plans consider the presenting risks for the family. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', page 14, paragraph 4.2)
- The registered provider should ensure that children are given information about the foster carer before they move in with them in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. In particular, ensure that information about fostering and fostering households is available in an appropriate format for parents who join a fostering household with their child. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', page 23, paragraph 11.3)
- The registered provider should ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. In particular, ensure that actions from reviews are completed. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.1)

## **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:** 2600784

**Registered provider:** Compass Fostering East Limited

**Registered provider address:** 3 Rayns Way, Syston, Leicester LE7 1PF

**Responsible individual:** Kathryn Swift

**Registered manager:** Tina Morris

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## **Inspectors**

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector

Trish Palmer, Social Care Inspector



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