

# Compass Fostering Central Ltd

Compass Fostering Central Limited

3 Rayns Way, Syston, Leicester, Leicestershire LE7 1PF

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 Syston, 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 212 fostering households and 283 children in placement.

The registered manager has been registered with Ofsted since 2023.

### Inspection dates: 5 to 9 February 2024

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account | <b>good</b> |
|---|-------------|

|   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| How well children and young people are helped and protected | requires improvement to be 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:** 10 May 2021

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Experiences for children are mixed. Some children benefit from established relationships and consistent positive parenting with foster carers. As a result, they are making progress in education, developing friendships and have enhanced self-esteem. Some foster carers have been with the provider for many years and demonstrate a nurturing approach and resilience. Carers have supported children through very difficult times and when risks and vulnerabilities to children are heightened.

The agency has an established education service to provide a range of support services for children. They provide in-house training to supervising social workers to support foster carers and children navigating education services.

Advocacy for children's education to support their rights to access suitable provision is available either through advice to supervising social workers or through education ambassadors (foster carers with experience in education services).

When children are excluded from school or require a new school place, this service offers support with alternative experiential learning, pending a long-term solution. This is a strong offer of respite for foster carers, when the family are experiencing stress due to a child being without education. This also supports stability of the placement for the child.

The service provides the registered manager with regular reports on children's attendance and children out of education. Educational participation for children has management oversight.

Foster carer representatives are positive about the agency's efforts to develop practice in relation to equality and diversity. Recently, there has been the first anti-racist summit convened to agree plans to develop practice and effective quality assurance.

There are regional and national groups for foster carers who work with the agency in considering protected characteristics for children and carers. Therapeutic practitioners routinely consider in their assessments how protected characteristics affect the needs and experiences of children and carers.

Children and carers have access to a tiered system of therapeutic support. Supervising social workers can access consultation clinics. Practitioners observe, assess and provide advice to support carers where a child's needs and behaviours may be changing or developing.

Improving take-up of this service is an area for development. Currently, a small number of children receive an intensive, time-limited package of therapeutic

support, when commissioned by the local authority. There are examples of where this has worked well, and placements have been sustained and/or children's needs and behaviours have been better understood.

Managers are strengthening the training offer to support the development of a consistent trauma-informed parenting approach for foster carers and social workers.

The children in care council has continued to function with a small cohort of children, including one birth child of a foster carer. The group has established a solid friendship circle. The social workers with lead responsibility for developing the group have liaised closely with foster carer locality groups to encourage and grow participation of children. There are regular activity events, including events celebrating achievements of children and carers that children do respond to.

Children develop questions and participate in interview panels of applicants to the provider. The children enjoy being involved.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Significant incidents of concern about risk of harm to children and actual harm to children have been appropriately notified to Ofsted. However, this inspection found evidence of the variable quality of practice, recording and oversight of safeguarding incidents.

There are separate matching processes for in-house moves between foster carers and children who are new to the provider. Children are listened to when expressing a view if they want to remain or return to a familiar foster family. However, of children reviewed in these circumstances, the matching processes have not been sufficiently robust. Consideration of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the skills of foster carers in relation to the needs of children is not always clearly evidenced. This is a missed opportunity to identify support and/or training for foster carers to meet the specific needs of children before being placed.

Some carers have raised concerns that they do not have sufficient information about the child's lived experience and needs prior to coming to live with them, to ensure that they are helping to support the child's emotional welfare.

Information in the records prior to matching and placement of siblings sharing a room was not robustly explored by social workers. This means that the risk assessment in place was not comprehensive or helpful to the carer in responding to concerns that may emerge about bedroom-sharing.

Supervising social workers are not routinely referring to or demonstrating curiosity about information in carers' daily records that could inform assessment of risk or changing needs and behaviours of children.

Supervision that has referred to emerging concerns about children does not always result in agreed actions.

A small number of risk assessments reviewed are descriptive rather than providing specific advice or being prescriptive, to be helpful to the carers. There is not consistent practice around maintaining a chronology of concerns and ongoing evaluation to support assessment of risk and inform management oversight.

Emerging contextual safeguarding concerns are not consistently identified by supervising social workers, such as early indicators of risk of sexual exploitation and/or criminal exploitation.

There were two incidents of concern about children in placement and lack of evidence of robust assessment of safe care or follow-up regarding the child's therapeutic needs. In one of these incidents, there was delay in referring the concern to the local authority designated officer. These were addressed by managers during the inspection.

There is a culture of learning within the agency. An auditing team reviews cases and identifies where there is good and better practice to be shared and where there is a need for practice improvement. Independent social workers are also commissioned, where appropriate, to provide objective oversight. Learning has been disseminated to staff and areas for improvement are understood by managers.

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

The registered manager is suitably experienced. Since she joined the team, staff and managers have said that she is accessible, she is providing stability and support for the team and staff understand her vision for the service.

Senior managers have identified and are addressing the impact to the service of a period of change. Some carers and staff referred to the impact of 'staff churn'.

The panel provides timely independent oversight of carer assessments and reviews. The panel also reviews arrangements where there have been complaints, resignations, and carers subject to allegations. There is oversight, and sometimes challenge, by the experienced agency decision-maker.

A recent review of the functioning of the panel and of foster carer reviews has resulted in a development plan which is being actioned. It is too early to report on the impact of this, but the registered manager knows the areas for strengthening across all the panel processes.

There is evidence that not all actions recommended at panel and reviews are completed in a timely way. Some of the recommendations from the review of the functioning of the panel will support better tracking of actions agreed at panel and annual foster carer reviews by supervising social workers and managers.

This inspection reviewed a small number of records which evidenced poor-quality information to panel, and poor-quality minutes of those meetings. The records did not fully support the recommendations made. The agency decision-maker had identified this and requested more information.

Some carers have fed back that they have experienced inconsistent responses at times because of changing social workers and/or duty workers.

Support groups for foster carers are available and are well attended. Some foster carers have reported that that local support groups are invaluable when there are changes in supervising social workers or when they have been without a social worker.

There has been a period, leading up to this inspection, when there was reduced management and social work capacity. Social workers have referred to the additional demands of providing an out-of-hours service alongside their daily case work. This has led to the strengthening of the duty service with additional capacity provided by an advanced practitioner.

Senior managers continuously review recruitment processes to make the best decisions and to retain staff to promote a stable workforce. This includes rewards to staff and an improved progression pathway.

There are improved, assessed induction processes for staff and managers developed and overseen by the head of learning and development.

Experienced staff have been retained and staff and managers reported to inspectors that they have benefited from development opportunities within the service. Staff also reported that they feel listened to.

Supervision of staff has remained regular and is recorded. There is evidence in supervision records of staff welfare being considered, and performance management concerns being identified and addressed.

There is positive, constructive partnership working with commissioning bodies, local authorities, and health, education and police partners.

There is a stable and well-resourced senior management team providing monitoring and quality assurance. There has been learning shared from a robust review of practice and management oversight following a serious incident. However, this inspection has identified that there has not been effective management oversight of the recording and responses to a small number of safeguarding concerns.

## 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, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

| Requirement   | Due date   |
|---|------------|
| The fostering service provider must keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide, and notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4 (a)(b))   | 1 May 2024 |
| The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))   | 1 May 2024 |
| The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (3)) | 1 May 2024 |

### Recommendations

- 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)
- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure that the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', page 43, paragraph 21.8)

## **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:** 3 Rayns Way, Syston, Leicester, Leicestershire  
LE7 1PF

**Responsible individual:** Kathryn Swift

**Registered manager:** Katie Bailey

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## **Inspectors**

Cathey Moriarty, Social Care Inspector  
Helen Gronhaug, Social Care Inspector

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