

Compass Services for Children Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Compass Children's Services was established in 1996 as a company limited by guarantee, undergoing a change of status to a company limited by share in October 2005. The agency's head office is in Loughborough, Leicestershire and it has office accommodation in Birmingham, which is used for carers meetings and training sessions and as a work base for social work staff. No placement work is undertaken from this office and no information is stored on the premises. The company provides foster carers across the Midlands region and accepts referrals from several local authorities. Compass provides for a variety of placement types: emergency, short term, respite, bridging, long term, sibling groups and has specialist provision in the areas of children with disabilities, parent and child placements, placement of babies and the placement of asylum seeking children. The agency was found during this inspection to have carers approved and trained accordingly. The agency is additionally able to provide education, training and transport services in negotiation with placing authorities and to undertake supervision of contact and life-story work. Both Executive Directors are qualified social workers with local authority experience in both child-care and management prior to joining Compass and both are actively involved in service provision. One of the directors has allocated responsibility for operations and the other for quality control and resource management. One of the directors is the Registered Fostering Service Manager. Three Heads of Service: Fostering, Education and Administration, constitute a middle management tier. Compass provides a 24-hour support network to all its carers and guarantees fortnightly visits to carers by the supervising social worker. The education team provide advice and support to staff and carers and the young people placed with them. A range of advisors and consultants provide specialist advice as required and children's services support workers provide additional services to both carers and young people on the basis of identified need. In October 2007 the agency supported 63 carer households and had 95 young people in placement.

Summary

Annual inspections of this fostering agency have demonstrated a consistent commitment to developing and improving practice with a view to improving outcomes for looked after children. The agency's policies, procedures and practices are robustly based on the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards and management, staff and carers verbalise and demonstrate a commitment to developing young people's skills and confidence to facilitate improved achievement. Both carers and young people are listened to and their views are incorporated well into the agency's development plans. Carers and placing social workers summarise this well: 'An extremely well organised, professional agency'; 'Both carers and children are always treated with respect'; 'Compass are proactive, thoughtful and creative in supporting very positive behaviour management strategies with young people'.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

During the previous inspection the agency was recommended to better demonstrate how young people were supported to represent their views to their placing authorities, particularly when they were unhappy with decisions made. Social work staff are able to cite several examples during the last year where young people have been robustly and successfully supported to

make such challenges. The agency has also reviewed and improved its consultation processes with the young people's panel and has now fully integrated the children's services team into the fostering service. The Compass charity, 'Positive Futures' has now been established with the primary aim of providing support for looked after children leaving Compass care and moving into adulthood. Applications can be made to the trustees for financial support in relation to accommodation issues or to access leisure activities or to advance education and training. Compass allocates resources to the charity according to its own annual level of activity. This makes a very positive support mechanism available to young people leaving care.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The agency provides comprehensive information, in the carers' handbook, detailing foster carers' responsibilities to promote the physical, emotional and social health of looked after children in their care. These guidelines include appropriate advice on the storage and administration of medication. Carers spoken to confirm that they always record any medicine given to young people. General health advice is regularly provided in 'The Squirrel', the agency's quarterly magazine for carers and young people. All Compass foster carers retain an individual record of each young person's placement and the file includes a dedicated health section where all medical appointments and interventions are recorded. Each carer completes a four-monthly report, which includes a summary of any health issues during that period, and sends it in to the agency to be forwarded to the young people's placing social workers. The health of young people in placement is regularly discussed with carers, at four-monthly supervision sessions, by supervising social workers. Details of young people's medical appointments and their outcomes are also included in the reports submitted by supervising social workers and carers to young people's Looked After Children (LAC) reviews. One placing social worker commented: 'Compass have very high standards in terms of promoting the physical and emotional health of young people'. The agency has commendable systems for monitoring young people's annual health assessments to ensure that these are completed appropriately and is diligent, though not always successful, in attempting to obtain copies of the health plans resulting from those assessments. The agency has good access to specialist health services and can easily negotiate counselling for young people or access, for advice or input, for carers or young people, to a Consultant Clinical Child Psychologist. The agency has developed good working relationships with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in many of the local authorities it works with regularly in order to better facilitate timely referrals of young people in need of those services. One carer commented: 'They [Compass] pushed for additional respite, CAMHS involvement and life-story work to help us manage difficult behaviours and so keep the child'. An excellent range of training is provided for carers and staff with the 2007/2008 programme including courses covering drugs awareness and sexualised behaviour. All Compass carers are required to undertake paediatric first aid training as an element of core training. Foster carers providing placements to young people within the specialist schemes are provided with good access to appropriate training, for example carers on the children with disabilities scheme have undertaken moving and handling training. Some training is delivered by Compass staff, with specialist knowledge, but a good range of external expertise is also accessed to provide training. Social workers working with carers providing placements to asylum seeking young people have developed a good knowledge of services able to provide advice about potential health issues specific to these young people.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There have been some structural changes within the agency since the previous inspection. A Head of Service Fostering (HOSF) has been appointed to provide oversight of the social work team and the team managers of the education and administrative teams have been re-designated as Head of Service Education (HOSE) and Head of Service Resources (HOSR) respectively. The children's service workers are now an integral part of the social work team. This reorganisation has brought about a more co-ordinated approach to service delivery promoting better outcomes for young people. All heads of service are appropriately qualified and experienced and provide solid and effective leadership to their respective staff teams. All social work staff are appropriately qualified and are encouraged and supported to undertake relevant post-qualification training with accredited providers. The agency operates a clear career structure for staff and this is a strong factor in staff retention. Compass employs the services of Active Personnel Management Limited to provide a personnel advisory service. The company provides human resource and employment law advice to the directors and produces employment contracts and procedures, job descriptions, a probation assessment system, appraisal system and equal opportunities policy. The company are actively involved in the Compass recruitment process in an advisory capacity. The agency has established a personnel panel to consider recruitment issues and also progression within the agency career structure. The involvement of an independent, professional advisory service in relation to personnel matters is commended. Personnel files are well ordered and contain full information relating to recruitment, interview and appointment, as required under the Fostering Regulations. The agency undertakes verbal checks on all references for staff. 'FosterTrack' (the agency's electronic database system) prompts renewal dates for statutory checks on both staff and carers. A health and safety risk assessment of each carer household is carried out annually and the four-monthly carer supervision agenda includes consideration of any changes which may impact on the health and safety of young people within the home, as well as checks relating to transporting of young people by carers (car tax, MOT and insurance). Foster carers' approval criteria includes details of what bedrooms are available for fostering and room share reports, considering potential risks, are completed wherever young people share bedrooms. Carers are provided with a good range of training opportunities around safe care, child protection and behaviour management and an external trainer commented on the high level of awareness that Compass carers demonstrated, of the factors influencing the behaviours of the young people they cared for. Placement referrals are given careful consideration. All available information is included in the initial referral form and young people's identified needs are carefully considered against carer skills, which are clearly detailed in Form F assessments. A matching report is completed to detail placement appropriateness and to identify any envisaged shortfalls in matching and how these will be addressed. Household safe care policies are compiled by all Compass carers as part of the approval process and these policies are appropriately reviewed in relation to young people placed. How safe care is being provided is a standing agenda item within each foster carer's four-monthly supervision agenda and is also carefully considered within the annual review process. The agency has a robust risk assessment process. Individual risk assessments are completed in relation to young people placed as well as in relation to any bedroom sharing arrangements, young people's contact arrangements and young people's involvement in activities. Young people feel safe and happy in their foster placements: 'I feel very safe and secure in my new home'; 'I am happy where I live now'; 'I feel loved and respected and part of a family'. Compass has strong fostering panel guidelines and the panel has a very clear quality

assurance function. The agency operates a commendable system of taking all foster carer reviews back to panel. The agency has introduced an excellent system for monitoring all issues raised by the panel, for example a criticism of an assessment report, and now produces a quarterly report, detailing how each of these issues has been addressed by the agency, which is shared with the Panel Chair. A good range of training opportunities is provided for panel members and one day is allocated each year for the panel to receive an update on the agency's developments during the year. The panel chair stated that he had 'every confidence in this agency to address any identified shortfalls immediately'.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The agency operates specialist fostering schemes for asylum seeking young people, young people with disabilities and parent and child placements. Carers providing placements on these schemes are accredited to do so. The accreditation requires the completion of specialist training courses designed to equip these carers with the skills required to meet the very specific needs of these particular groups of young people. Disability Awareness training, for example, is an essential component for carers on the children with disabilities scheme as is training on the administration of medication and training from qualified health professionals, where necessary, in relation to potentially complex health needs. Social work staff supervising these carers are experienced practitioners who have themselves acquired wide ranging knowledge in these areas of expertise. The social worker leading on the Asylum seeking scheme has established good links with ASSIST (Health advice for asylum seekers) and with a range of other professional organisations and has established good access to interpreter services. Referral forms and matching reports contain full information about young people's specific needs in relation to race, culture and religion and, where potential shortfalls are apparent in matching these needs, details of how shortfalls will be addressed. Young people's records demonstrate that, in many of these cases, supervising social workers have provided carers with useful literature and contact details for organisations likely to offer support. Files demonstrate that carers too have been proactive in securing information and in accessing resources to equip them to fully meet young people's needs. Currently neither the pro-forma record used for carer supervision nor the pro-forma record used by carers for their four-monthly returns require any comment on how young people's cultural needs are being met and sometimes carers and supervising social workers are omitting to record some of the good work being undertaken. The HOSE works pro-actively and innovatively to secure and maintain appropriate school placements for all young people placed with Compass foster carers. She has developed positive working relationships with key education personnel in the various local authorities that the agency works with, and uses these relationships well to urge timely responses to placement requests. The commitment to maintaining young people in appropriate education placements involves her in attending Personal Education Plan meetings and other education meetings, where there are identified difficulties or where carers require support. Compass additionally operates its own complementary education programme, which is made available to young people who have been without a school placement for ten days. Many foster carers have been trained and are well supported to assist in the delivery of this programme, utilising their specialist skills and talents to provide a broad curriculum, which supports young people to grow in confidence and ability. Where appropriate a complementary education programme is devised to support a part-time education placement and, by offering enhanced individual support, to improve young people's educational achievements. All young people's educational achievements are clearly recognised and rewarded with letters of commendation and certificates, which build into an

impressive portfolio demonstrating their progress. Planning and evaluation sheets are completed by the carers who deliver sessions within the complementary education programme and young people are encouraged to contribute their comments to the evaluation process. Many positive comments have been received from young people and carers value the programme very highly: 'This [education] is an area in which Compass excels. They provide their own complementary education package. Letters are regularly sent out to the children and they are given excellent encouragement to succeed and are always praised highly for their work and effort'. The Compass education service has also provided funding for some schools to appoint their own support staff to meet young people's specific identified support needs. Young people and carers also say that Compass encourages the involvement of young people in a wide range of extra-curricular and leisure and sporting activities. Both carers and young people speak very positively about the support they receive in relation to education and leisure: 'They openly encourage and support us to help children to take part in activities at home, at school and in our community'; 'They help me think about my future and I do lots of things with them. I'm really happy here because they care for me'; 'They always take good care of me and we do enjoyable activities together'. The agency has long demonstrated a real commitment to improving young people's reading skills and has 27 carers trained to deliver the 'Catch Up' reading programme. These carers are trained to promote literacy skills with all young people, whatever their age and there have been some very positive results for young people: 'The 'Catch Up' programme has been a really helpful one. One of my children has been taken off the special needs register as a result'. This year the agency has also implemented the 'Language into Literacy' project aimed at developing the literacy skills of young people who are new to the English language. Eleven carers have already been trained to deliver this package and it has been of particular benefit to asylum seeking young people fostered within the agency. Statistics and young people's records are clear indicators of how successful this project has been in supporting these young people to better access the education system. Where young people move to other Compass carers for respite, a separate respite folder containing all relevant information about them, including a pen picture completed by the young person and detailing their likes and dislikes, goes to the respite carer in order that the carer is fully equipped to meet the young person's identified needs.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There is strong promotion by the agency, both in the carers' handbook and within foster carer training, of the expectation that carers will promote and support agreed contact arrangements for young people in placement. Young people's records demonstrate that carers support contact well by providing transport to contact venues and by encouraging and facilitating telephone contact. The agency is able to provide examples where young people have been successfully supported to challenge their placing authorities in situations where they have been unhappy about their contact arrangements. A carer commented: 'This agency recognises that all Looked After Children have rights and that these should be recognised and supported'. The agency has good systems for ensuring that young people are able to raise issues of concern. Records demonstrate that complaints and allegations made by young people are taken seriously and responded to, by the agency, in a timely manner. Children's services staff undertake some excellent individual and group work with young people and are actively involved in regular activity days, an annual residential and in delivering the Youth Achievement Award scheme, which is operated for fostered children and carer's children over the age of twelve years. The awards are accredited nationally by ASDAN and reward key and social skills development. The

views of young people in foster care and of foster carers' own children are regularly sought by the supervising social worker and are recorded and, at the time of the carer's annual review, these views are represented in the supervising social worker's report. A senior practitioner has designated responsibility for consultation with young people and facilitates the young people's panel, which meets every month. Several young people who have left care have stayed involved in the panel and their experiences and mentoring have helped and supported other young people to express their views. The young people's panel has good opportunities to influence company policy and practice through meetings with the management team and with foster carers' groups. The panel has recently been instrumental in redesigning the young people's service guide and in developing a consultation document for young people to use for their LAC reviews. Compass workers have taken responsibility for ensuring that, once completed, this document is forwarded to young people's independent reviewing officers well in advance of their review date.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The agency has a clear Statement of Purpose, which is subject to regular review and update and fully details its constitution, aims and objectives and the range of services provided. Young people have been fully involved in designing a new young people's guide to the service. The management structure of the agency is very clear, with active involvement of both directors and a robust and effective middle management structure, which guides practice well. There is a clear career structure for staff in all areas of operation with robust systems for support, supervision and appraisal. The agency works consistently to establish strong working relationships with placing authorities and has good systems for monitoring that those local authorities fulfil their statutory responsibilities to young people. The agency has excellent quality assurance and monitoring systems in place. A copy of the director's monitoring report covering the period from April 2006 to March 2007 was supplied to the inspector during this inspection and the report demonstrates the agency's commitment to maintaining an extremely high standard of placement provision. 'Fostertrack' is subject to ongoing development and improvement and facilitates the collection of wide ranging statistical information to evidence that young people in placements with the agency generally achieve well in all outcome areas. Agency practices are consistently refined with the express purpose of improving services to young people. Staff throughout this agency demonstrate a real commitment to positive outcomes for children and young people and to supporting carers well. One carer commented 'Compass has highly motivated staff, with lots of experience, who feel compassion for their jobs and for the children generally and this supports carers well in their demanding role'. This agency has a commendable commitment to carer and staff training. There is a designated training and development officer who demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring the provision of an extensive range of core and specialist training opportunities and to ensuring that these are appropriately accessed by carers. All carers and staff have a personal development plan, which is closely monitored, and there is a stated expectation that all carers will access training appropriately and continually develop their skills in order to ensure that a high standard of care is provided for young people in placement. The agency strongly encourages carers to complete the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 and supports them well to do so. A half time social worker post is dedicated to NVQ support and four staff are qualified NVQ

assessors. The agency are already very aware of the new Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training standards in relation to foster carers, which will be implemented in April 2008, and are already piloting the induction scheme with a group of newly approved carers. Carers receive a high level of individual support, with fortnightly visits from supervising social workers, and there are good wider support networks with strong, geographically based carer support groups meeting regularly and all carers and staff gathering twice a year for the fostering development group meeting. Carers and staff have good opportunities to inform the development of agency policy and practice with representatives involved in the training steering group and the practice consultation group. The directors are closely involved with all carers, making an annual monitoring visit to all foster homes and sometimes attending carer support group meetings. Systems for the recruitment and approval of foster carers are robust and Form F assessments examined during this inspection were completed to a good standard with a strong focus on carer skills and competencies, good analysis of information and a clear identification of areas for development. Records relating to carers and young people and general administrative records are retained to a high standard. Both electronic and hard copy records are clear, well organised and easily accessed. Staff, carers and supervising social workers highlighted communication and consultation as real strengths of this agency: 'Communication is purposeful and clear and staff are always accessible'.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.