



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Compass Services for Children Limited

**Mountfields House
Squirrel Way
Epinal Way
Loughborough
LE11 3GE**

Lead Inspector
Sharon Treadwell

Key Announced Inspection
4th January 2007 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Compass Services for Children Limited
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Telephone number	0870 850 1012
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Email address	admin@compasschildren.co.uk
Provider Web address	www.compasschildren.co.uk
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Compass Services for Children Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Jane Greenhalgh
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 23rd February 2006

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 Coleshill, 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 local authorities all over the country.

Compass provides for a variety of placement types: emergency, short term, respite, bridging, long term, sibling groups and has developed specialist provision in the areas of disability, parent and child assessment, including preparing reports for the court and the placement of asylum seeking children. The agency was found during this inspection to have carers approved accordingly.

Compass Children's Services 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. One of the directors has allocated responsibility for operations and the other for quality control and resource management. One of the Directors is currently operating as the Registered Fostering Service Manager.

The Compass Team comprises four elements: The Fostering Service comprises 10 Supervising Social Workers (8FTE), a Training and Development Officer and a part time National Vocational Qualification specialist;

The Children's Service comprises the manager, one full time level 4 Support Worker and 4 part time Support Workers;

The Education Service comprises the manager and a part time qualified teacher;

The Administration Service comprises the manager and 8.5 staff (7.5 FTE) with allocated responsibilities relating to contracts, finance and general administration.

Compass provides a 24-hour support network to all it's 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.

Fees range from £750.40 to £1187.90 according to the age of the child and the nature of placement.

SUMMARY

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

This was a planned inspection carried out by one inspector with fieldwork taking four days.

For the purposes of this inspection four young people and the two foster carers with whom these young people were placed were tracked through the inspection of case files, home visits and discussions with young people, foster carers and relevant agency staff, either in person or by telephone. Several attempts to contact the placing social workers of young people tracked were unsuccessful.

Records relating to other carers and young people were examined in less detail during the inspection.

A Fostering Panel was observed on December 12th 2006 and the Panel Chair was interviewed by telephone during the inspection. The inspector additionally examined panel minutes relating to three previous panels.

In addition, during December, the inspector attended a Foster Carer training session on Behaviour Management, a meeting of the Practice Consultation Group (a consultative group of carers and staff, which looks at developments in policy and practice) and a meeting of the Young People's Panel.

During the inspection the inspector attended a staff meeting.

All of these activities have provided information included in this report.

At the time of preparing this report, questionnaire responses had been received from 16 foster carers, 2 placing Social Workers and 9 young people, and the views contained in these have been reflected in the report.

Questionnaires were additionally returned by four people with professional involvement with the agency: Nottingham Trent University who are involved in providing post-qualification training to social work staff; an assessor in parent/child assessments; an Accredited Learning Development Officer who provides advice relating to the Youth Achievement Awards programme and Active Personnel Management Limited who operate as consultants to Compass in relation to employment issues.

Prior to the inspection the Registered Manager provided the Commission for Social Care Inspection with a range of written information about service operation, which has informed this report.

Compass was able to demonstrate during this inspection, it's continuing commitment to the principles of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. No requirements have been identified during this inspection and one recommendation has been made.

What the service does well:

The agency's system for monitoring its operation and practice is comprehensive. A copy of the Director's recent monitoring report was supplied to the inspector during this inspection and the report evidences the agency's commitment to maintaining an extremely high standard of placement provision.

The management structure of the agency is clear, with active involvement of the Directors. There is a clear career structure for staff in all areas of operation with robust systems for support, supervision and appraisal.

Young people said that they felt safe and very well cared for in their placements: 'I have felt cared for and loved for the last two and a half years'; 'They tell me what is best for me to do and lead me down the right path'.

The agency is commended on its dedication to the risk assessment process in relation to a whole range of areas. There is clear commitment to assessment of risk in relation to any bedroom sharing arrangements, young people's involvement in activities and unsupervised contact arrangements.

The agency is commended on its practice, where possible and appropriate, of approving a member of the carer's family to provide respite, in order that the child remains an integrated member of that family network.

Compass is commended on the provision of an excellent range of educational support systems. The agency utilises the skills of its carers extremely well in delivering its complementary education programme. Carers value the educational input with young people very highly, with the majority rating it as excellent in their questionnaires. There is strong evidence that young people are achieving well on this scheme.

The provision of a dedicated Children's Services Team is commended and this team undertakes some excellent individual and group work with young people. The agency has a good range of informal communication systems with young people and is developing its more formal systems well.

The agency operates an excellent Youth Achievement Award programme, which provides commendable encouragement to young people to develop self-care skills and confidence. Young people's individual achievements in all areas are very positively recognised by the agency. Young people are well supported to develop skills to move towards independence.

Carers visited were retaining good records of placement. Carer's four monthly returns provide an excellent means of monitoring how well young people are being supported to achieve the five outcomes and copies of these are provided to placing authorities.

There is robust administrative support provided by workers who have specific allocated tasks and the Administration Service Manager was observed to have an excellent knowledge of all areas of agency operation and to provide a high level of support to staff in all areas, particularly in respect of recording practices and use of FosterTrack.

The agency has a commendable commitment to foster carer support and training. Foster carers receive four-monthly recorded supervision to a comprehensive agenda and additionally they receive fortnightly visits.

Foster carers responding to questionnaires largely rated the support provided by the agency as excellent: 'I do not believe I would be able to care for my foster child this well if it was not for their genuine support'; 'As a new carer I feel informed and supported in my new role'.

The agency operates a commendable system of taking all foster carer reviews back to an independent 'panel process'.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has introduced a respite folder, which is retained by the mainstream carer and contains full information regarding the young person's care and medical needs and is passed to carers providing respite for them to make appropriate entries during the young person's stay.

The agency is commended on the development of its own medical consent form and on its circulation to the placing authorities of all young people in placement to obtain signatures.

There has been a notable improvement in staff morale, team spirit and consistency of recording practices.

The agency has developed clear written policy and procedural guidelines in relation to the provision of short breaks.

During the last year Compass has further developed its specialist schemes for Asylum Seeking young people and for Children with Disabilities. Both schemes have been set up in a carefully considered and professional way and have the potential to provide placements to meet very specific needs and provide very positive developmental opportunities. Foster carers allocated to these schemes are trained and experienced in their specialism and are being provided with ongoing training updates.

The Young People's Panel, established in late 2005, has developed a stronger voice within the agency. There is good evidence that the views of young people are being encouraged and are being listened to and acted upon.

The agency has developed a comprehensive carer career structure, which recognises carers' skill development in a formal manner. The scheme will provide four levels, each of which has clearly specified requirements, which are well linked to carer competencies and training expectations.

Records relating to both carers and young people were much more easily accessed than during the previous inspection. There have been considerable developments since the previous inspection to FosterTrack, the agency's database and electronic recording system.

What they could do better:

The inspector has suggested that the agency devise a standard letter for circulation to placing authorities requesting that the Health Plan element of young people's annual health assessment be forwarded annually for sharing with carers

The inspector has suggested that the matching pro-forma be reviewed and revised to better demonstrate evidence supportive to the appropriateness of a placement.

The agency should evidence that young people are more robustly supported to represent their wishes and feelings and that appropriate advocacy is secured to ensure that their views are fully considered by their placing authorities. Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

Standard 12.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

The fostering service provides positive outcomes for young people's continued good health and well-being.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

All Compass carers are required to undertake paediatric first aid training as an element of Core Training. This training is provided at intervals 'in house' but there is also the capacity for carers to access this training locally, with an accredited training provider, funded by Compass.

The agency provides comprehensive policy and procedural guidance, in the Carer's Handbook, detailing foster carers' responsibilities to promote and improve the health of looked after children in their care. These guidelines include appropriate advice on the storage and administration of medication and the provision of a pro-forma Medication Administration Record.

In their questionnaires young people confirmed that they were encouraged to pursue healthy lifestyles: 'I am well fed, I am sheltered and I am kept clean, tidy and healthy'; 'My foster mum encourages me to eat healthily and I help to prepare healthy meals for the family'; 'I'm always getting advice on when I should go to the doctors and dentists'; 'I have vegetables on my dinner and take two fruits to school. I know what's healthy and unhealthy'.

One young person said 'My carer tries very, very hard to encourage me but I HATE veg'.

One of the young people spoken to during the inspection had recently sustained an injury requiring hospital treatment. Full records of the accident were on the young person's records and appropriate treatment had been quickly accessed.

One young person tracked had been appropriately referred to an orthodontist for dental work.

One young person tracked was having regular assessments of a visual impairment and had received input from a speech therapist.

All young people accommodated by Compass carers have access, where necessary to up to twelve sessions of counselling.

There is a clearly stated expectation that specific records relating to health are retained by carers.

The agency policy is that the carer retains a 'Green file' (record of placement) in respect of each child placed with them. The file has a dedicated health section where medical appointments and their outcomes are recorded by carers. Full details are submitted by the carer to the agency within their 4 monthly return and health issues are also listed as a discussion point at four monthly supervision sessions with Supervising Social Workers. Detail of young people's medical appointments and their outcomes is also included in the report submitted to the panel as part of the annual review process.

The 'Green file' moves with the child throughout placement with Compass carers and, should placement with the agency cease, is returned to the placing authority. Copies of carers 4 monthly returns are also forwarded to placing authorities.

During the previous inspection it was noted that carers providing respite were not always receiving appropriate health information in relation to young people and also that they were not retaining health records in the way expected of mainstream carers. The agency has introduced a respite folder (Yellow File), which is retained by the mainstream carer and contains full information regarding the young person's care and medical needs and is passed to carers providing respite for them to make appropriate entries during the young person's stay.

During the previous inspection the agency was noted to rely, for consent to medical treatment, on appropriately signed Looked After Children documentation and as a result signed medical consent was not in place on some of the files examined. The agency is commended on the development of its own medical consent form and on its circulation to the placing authorities of all young people in placement to obtain signatures.

Files evidence that annual health assessments of young people are monitored through the Looked After Children review system and that agency staff chase these where appropriate. None of the young people's files examined contained a copy of the Health Plan, which results from the annual health assessment and the inspector has suggested that the agency devise a standard letter for circulation to placing authorities requesting that this element of the assessment be forwarded annually for sharing with carers

The agency has recently developed its smoking policy to incorporate good advice for carers on the discouragement of young people who smoke and also clear expectations in relation to carers who smoke, from both the health and the safety perspective.

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)

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 & 30.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

Staff and foster carers have a good understanding of providing a safe environment for young people. Child protection and robust recruitment, selection and approval procedures are promoted throughout the agency's working. Children and young people are provided with warm, safe and comfortable foster homes with trained and competent carers.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

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, 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. The involvement of an independent, professional advisory service in relation to personnel matters is commended.

No personnel files were examined during this inspection but previous inspections have always noted files to be well ordered and to contain full information relating to recruitment, interview and appointment, as required under the Fostering Regulations. The agency is particularly commended on its practice of undertaking verbal checks on all references.

The four service managers are responsible for supervision of their own staff teams and all staff spoken to during this inspection confirmed that they received regular supervision and annual appraisals and had good access to training opportunities.

Developments to 'FosterTrack' (the agency's electronic database system) result in the system prompting staff as renewal dates for statutory checks on carers approach.

Since the departure of the previous Fostering Service Manager (immediately prior to the previous inspection) one of the Directors has resumed this role. This 'hands on' management approach has involved close monitoring, evaluation and refinement of working practice and has probably been an important factor in the noted improvement in staff morale, team spirit and consistency of recording practices.

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 in all areas and is in the process of implementing a similarly clear career structure for its foster carers. This is clearly a strong factor in staff retention.

The agency's system for monitoring its operation and practice is comprehensive. A copy of the Director's monitoring report covering the period from April 2005 to March 2006 was supplied to the inspector during this inspection and the report evidences the agency's commitment to maintaining an extremely high standard of placement provision.

All carer files examined contained household Safe Care Policies and evidence that these were appropriately reviewed in relation to young people placed. Safe care is a standing agenda item within the foster carer's four monthly supervision agenda and is also carefully considered within the annual review process. The Fostering Panel was noted to have a good awareness of the importance of safe caring practices.

Young people said that they felt safe and well cared for in their placements: 'They talk to us about keeping safe and not to talk to people I don't know'; 'I feel very safe here and it's a better home'; 'I am very happy where I live'.

One placing social worker commented 'This is a positive, consistent and very nurturing placement'.

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 health and safety within the home as well as checks relating to transporting of young people by carers (Car tax, MOT and insurance).

The foster homes visited during the inspection were providing a high standard of care to young people in placement and carers spoken to during the inspection evidenced a good awareness of their responsibilities to keep young people safe.

Carers are provided with a good range of training opportunities around safe care, child protection and behaviour management and agency staff confirmed their expectation that carer training in these areas is regularly updated. The inspector attended behaviour management training provided by agency staff during the inspection and noted the provision of good theoretical knowledge as well as ample opportunities for carers to discuss their individual experiences and concerns around the management of challenging behaviours.

The Carer's Handbook includes good guidance for carers on ways to encourage positive behaviours and a clear definition of permitted and prohibited sanctions. The agency is commended on the inclusion of policy and guidance, and on the introduction of training, around restraint.

The agency is commended on its dedication to the risk assessment process in relation to a whole range of areas. There is clear commitment to assessment of risk in relation to any bedroom sharing arrangements, young people's contact arrangements and young people's involvement in activities.

Changes to Criminal Records Bureau procedures for implementing checks have resulted in an inability to request checks on babysitters used by foster carers. The agency has developed a robust risk assessment pro-forma for completion by Supervising Social Workers, with carers to ensure that the safety of young people is prioritised.

Form F assessments of carers have a commendable focus on carer competencies, as does the carer training programme, the annual review process and the carer career structure. The initial assessment specifically identifies matching considerations relating to potential future placements and carer skills are well documented. The agency has worked during the last year on clearer definitions of carer approval status to better support the matching process.

A matching pro-forma is completed by the duty social worker in relation to each placement made and this is countersigned by the manager to confirm approval. The pro-forma requires an identification of any shortfalls in the match and detail of how these will be addressed.

Although information in files relating to young people's identified needs and carer skills and discussions with young people, staff and carers confirmed that the young people tracked during this inspection were well matched to their carers, the matching pro-forma did not fully represent the agency's considerations prior to making the placement. The format encourages the inclusion of very minimal information and the inspector has suggested that the form be reviewed and revised to better demonstrate evidence supportive to the appropriateness of the placement.

Compass has strong Fostering Panel guidelines and the Panel has a clear quality assurance function. The agency operates a commendable system of taking all foster carer reviews back to a 'panel process' with lesser quoracy requirements. The inspector attended a meeting of this panel and subsequently held a telephone discussion with the Panel Chair.

The panel clearly identified issues that they felt had not been sufficiently well clarified within a social worker's written report and, where issues had been raised about a carer's recording skills, the panel appropriately queried training provided by the agency.

The Chair confirmed that the agency responded positively and pro-actively to any criticism and that existing structures worked well to facilitating the raising of any concerns. The Chair informed the inspector that changes to membership during the last year had offered 'valuable new perspectives'.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Standards 7, 13 & 31.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The Agency provides an excellent and innovative range of support systems, backed by resources, to strongly promote the educational and personal achievements of children and young people and help them achieve their full potential.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

During the last year Compass has further developed its specialist schemes for Asylum Seeking young people and for Children with Disabilities. A Supervising Social Worker has been allocated to lead on each of these projects and the social worker leading on the Asylum Seeking Scheme was spoken to during the inspection. Full written information was provided relating to the other scheme. Foster carers allocated to these schemes are trained and experienced in their specialism and are being provided with ongoing training updates.

Written information clearly identifies the range of disabilities, which agency carers are able to accommodate within the Children with Disabilities Scheme. Disability Awareness training is an essential component of this scheme as is training on the administration of medication and training from qualified health professionals, where necessary, in relation to potentially complex health needs.

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.

Both schemes have been set up in a carefully considered and professional way and have the potential to provide placements to meet very specific needs and provide very positive developmental opportunities.

The agency's Education Service Manager told the inspector that the Education Team's project for this coming year was around 'English as a second language' Training has been provided to members of Compass Staff on English for Asylum Seekers and The Education Service manager aims to develop a programme for carers to work with asylum seeking young people on this.

She has already developed good working relationships with a number of local schools providing placements to the fifteen asylum seeking young people currently in placements with Compass carers.

The matching process carefully considers young people's specific individual needs. In the case of two young people tracked during this inspection and placed with carers of different racial/cultural background, robust support systems were in place to ensure that cultural/racial needs were fully considered and addressed. Carers were being provided with appropriate advice and being supported in purchasing reading materials and equipment.

The carers were working well to develop the young people's interests and involvement in activities, within very severe restrictions currently imposed by the children's placing authority.

Training has been provided, within carer support groups, to all carers on equality and diversity.

Compass is commended on the provision of an excellent range of educational support systems. The Education Service manager visits all young people placed with Compass carers very soon after placement to discuss their current educational status and any support needs. Where young people are without a school placement an Experiential Education Programme is implemented. The agency works closely with all its placing authorities in ensuring that educational opportunities provided work alongside those provided by the authority.

The Experiential Education Programme has developed considerably during the last year. The agency utilises the skills of its carers in delivering this programme. A number of carers are now supporting the teaching staff, the Children's Services Team and the main carer in providing experiential learning sessions to young people. Some commendable work has been undertaken by the carers providing this service and timetables, education plans and evaluations evidence that young people are achieving well, developing useful skills and gaining in confidence and self esteem. The carers involved in this scheme are well supported and supervised by the Education Service Manager.

During this inspection the inspector viewed several very impressive pieces of work undertaken with young people and read some of the assessments of the young people who were extremely proud of their achievements.

Young people spoke extremely positively of the support they received from carers: 'They tell me to be good at school and if I have homework they advise me to do it'; 'I'm always encouraged to do homework. My foster mum is helping me towards going to college to study hairdressing'.

Several examples were noted of young people achieving exceptionally well: one asylum seeking young person, who spoke no English when placed two years ago, has recently obtained eleven GCSE passes; one young person involved in the experiential education programme was noted by a carer to have notable bowling skills and has just had a trial with Leicestershire Cricket Team.

One of the young people tracked during this inspection had a difficult educational history, with a significant number of exclusions, and is now achieving well. Her carer confirmed that there had been extremely positive comments at a recent parent's evening.

Carers value the educational input with young people very highly, with the majority rating it as excellent in their questionnaires. The following comments were made: 'Two young people placed in an emergency were not attending school as their authority would not organise taxi transfers. Compass just funded it and sorted it'; 'The education worker is just fantastic. She came out to see us for four hours and talked about the girls, telling us if we ever needed to speak with her or go to the school she would come with us'; 'Compass offers an excellent education package. They put in place a complementary education programme, which meant trained carers provided education for S on most days of the week and worked hard to get him back into mainstream school'.

Last year the agency conducted a pilot study for 'Catch Up', a reading intervention programme. The results of this scheme were supplied to the inspector and there were some good improvements in the literacy of young people involved. Carers involved also developed excellent skills, which will be invaluable to young people in the future.

The Education Service Manager has excellent systems for the collection of statistics relating to attendance and achievement and the figures demonstrate an extremely successful system. The 'personal touch' is highly commended with young people getting a letter from her to celebrate, even the most minor achievement, which carers retain within their Education Log.

The Children's Services Team are involved in supporting young people within the Complementary Education provision as well as in delivering the Youth Achievement Award programme, which involves young people in a wide range of activities, recognising and rewarding their many achievements.

As recommended during the previous inspection, the agency has developed clear written policy and procedural guidelines in relation to the provision of short breaks. At the time of this inspection Compass was not providing any such placements.

The agency provides respite care for its own carers. During the previous inspection carers' recording in relation to respite and short term breaks was noted not to be consistent with recording by mainstream carers. This has been satisfactorily addressed with the development of a separate respite folder containing all relevant information about each young person, including a pen picture completed by the young person and detailing their likes and dislikes.

The Young People's Panel was consulted about how respite affects young people who are fostered. The Compass Directors took on board their views and suggestions for improvement.

The agency is commended on its practice, where possible and appropriate, of approving a member of the carer's family to provide respite, in order that the child remains an integrated member of that family network.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Standards 10 & 11.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

Young people feel well consulted by both their carers and the agency. Informal systems for this are excellent and formal systems are developing well.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

There is strong promotion by the agency, both in the Carer's Handbook and within foster carer training, of the expectation that carers will promote and support agreed contact arrangements for young people in placement.

The agency is commended on its focus on appropriate risk assessment of any contact arrangements, which are not supervised by the placing authority.

The young people spoken to confirmed that contact arrangements were good. Members of the Young People's Panel felt strongly that Compass staff and carers, and particularly members of the Children's Services Team were more helpful in supporting them to challenge arrangements they were unhappy with than their placing social workers.

In the case of two young people tracked, their very strong views on contact had been listened to and implemented.

One young person, in a questionnaire, said: 'When I said I didn't want contact any more with my family my social worker listened and understood why'.

The agency has a good range of informal communication systems with young people and is developing its more formal systems well. The provision of a dedicated Children's Services Team is commended and this team undertakes some excellent individual and group work with young people. There are regular activity days and an annual residential and a Youth Achievement Award scheme is operated for fostered children and carer's children over the age of twelve years. The awards are accredited nationally ASDAN and reward key and social skills development.

A Celebration Day was held in September 2006 for Compass's tenth anniversary. The day was attended by staff, carers, young people and associated professionals and the photographs viewed during the inspection evidence that it was well attended and extremely successful.

The Young People's Panel was established in late 2005. Membership of the panel is on a voluntary basis and its role is progressively growing. Regular meetings are facilitated by members of the Children's Services Team. The inspector attended a meeting of the panel in December and is grateful to the young people for their contribution to this inspection.

The Children's Services Team Manager was interviewed during the inspection and detailed proposals for members of the panel to provide support to other young people placed by Compass with individual issues arising. They will be supported in this by staff. The panel members will also be more involved in meetings of staff and carer groups to represent young people's views within these forums. There are also plans to develop activity days into workshops to look more creatively at specific issues affecting young people in foster care.

The young people's views are listened to and acted upon by the agency and have resulted in the development of a Respite Charter and a review of the provision of respite care.

Members of the Children's Services Team have been actively involved in supporting young people to access advocacy services and one young person told the inspector of her success, with this support, in challenging her readiness for independent living.

Contact details for each young person's local authority Children's Rights Officer are included in their Welcome Pack. Currently these details are on a separate single sheet of paper, which would be easily misplaced and the inspector would suggest that, when reprinting occurs, it be incorporated into the complaints leaflet.

Currently the views of young people in foster care and of foster carer's own children are regularly sought by the Supervising Social worker and are recorded. At the time of the carer's annual review these views are represented in the social worker's report. The manager confirmed that the agency was working on consultation forms for fostered children and carer's children in order that they may represent their own views at the time of a carer's review. This will be a positive development.

There are also plans to develop a questionnaire for young people, along similar lines to the foster carer's four monthly return, to regularly secure their views about their placements. The Young People's Panel will be actively involved in designing all these questionnaires.

One young person on the panel is a care leaver who attends on a voluntary basis and also supported the last Compass Residential. The agency hopes to encourage other young people leaving Compass care to remain involved with the Young People's Panel.

During the inspection the inspector noted that the views and wishes of two young people were not being fully considered by their placing authority. Restrictions were in place, which limited the young people's capacity to partake in activities available to other young people of a similar age and the young people were resentful of this; 'I do get bored when I think about what other people are allowed to do but I aren't even aloud to play out'; 'They're trying to help me to be able to swim'.

There was no evidence to indicate that these restrictions were imposed for safety reasons.

In response to the question: Do your carers listen to you and take notice of your opinions? one of these young people said: 'They can't do anything about it till its got through my social worker and I aren't allowed to play out with my mates or go to town with them'.

The carer's questionnaire details: 'They are not allowed to do any activities outside the home due to the parent's wishes'.

Records indicate that the agency has challenged the placing authority regarding the appropriateness of these restrictions, which the records indicate are a parental request, and the carer has commented 'Compass have really tried to challenge this at the children's reviews'.

During the inspection the inspector was also informed that these young people have a court appointed guardian, who is male and who they find it difficult to talk to and will not see. These views should be represented clearly to the placing authority and to the court.

The agency should now evidence that these young people are more robustly supported to represent their wishes and feelings and that appropriate advocacy is secured to ensure that their views are fully considered.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

Young people are very well supported to develop social and personal skills to equip them for independent living.

The development of a clear and robust carer payment system ensures that carer competencies and commitment to training are recognised and appropriately rewarded.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Compass is in the process of establishing an organisation (Positive Futures), which can apply for charitable status, to support young people leaving Compass care. The organisation is expected to be operational by April 2007. The expectation is that the Trustees will provide grants, loans or cash in kind to young people, enabling them to undertake the transition to adulthood in a better-supported way.

The agency, largely through its Children's Services Team, operates an excellent Youth Achievement Award programme, which provides commendable encouragement to young people to develop self-care skills and confidence. Several of the young people spoken to during this inspection had achieved awards within the scheme or were currently undertaking them. One young person tracked had been supported to obtain a place on an 'Entry to Employment' course at a local college.

Young people's individual achievements in all areas are very positively recognised by the agency in individual letters of congratulation and by reflection in the Squirrel magazine. Their achievement of awards and their letters of recognition enable the young people to build up robust portfolios demonstrating their capabilities to future education providers or employers.

All young people aged fifteen plus are allocated a Children's Services Team worker to support their progression towards leaving care, both through appropriate skill development and through active involvement with the placing authority in 'Pathway planning'. Foster carers are also very actively involved in supporting and monitoring young people's personal skill development.

There was good evidence in one of the files tracked of the agency monitoring and encouraging appropriate 'Pathway planning'.

Young people spoke of good support: 'I am being helped towards living in my own flat'; 'I'm prompted to go on courses to further my education and am getting help seeking jobs'.

The young people spoken to at the Young People's Panel expressed extremely strong views about the inappropriate expectation that all young people were ready for independence at eighteen. They referred to the fact that this was a different expectation to that of carer's own children. Recently two members of the group have attended the Care First Conference, supported by staff, to represent their views about proposed legal changes to support provided to Looked After Children post-eighteen. The agency is taking young people's views very seriously and is supporting them well to have their views heard.

One young person told the inspector that she had been well supported to seek advice and support from her local authority Children's Rights Service, the Commission for Social Care Inspection Children's Rights Office and a solicitor, to challenge her capacity to live independently.

The manager told the inspector that the agency was currently working closely with placing authorities on the specific support needs, post-eighteen, of young people with disabilities. The agency hopes ultimately to extend its provision to ensure that the identified support needs of these young people in relation to moving successfully into adulthood can be better met.

The Carers' Handbook contains clear detail regarding carer payments, including a full breakdown of the constituent elements of the allowance. The handbook also clarifies respite booking arrangements and entitlement. There is a full summary of tax and insurance responsibilities.

A budget is specifically allocated for individual carer's external training needs and access is by application to the Training Officer. This is commended.

Several carers are currently supporting young people involved in the Complementary Education Programme by providing experiential learning opportunities and the agency is paying carers separately to their fostering allowance in recognition of the time devoted to this task. Time sheets are completed and signed off by the Education Service Manager.

The agency has developed a comprehensive carer career structure, which recognises carers' skill development in a formal manner. The scheme is currently in the process of implementation and the implementation process has involved good consultation with carers and regular updates on progress.

The scheme will provide four levels, each of which has clearly specified requirements, which are well linked to carer competencies and training expectations.

Applications for progression must be supported by the carer's Supervising Social Worker and are considered by an independent panel. A range of very comprehensive application documentation has been prepared to ensure that carers fully evidence that they meet the stipulated criteria.

Designated administrative staff are responsible for carer payments. There were no issues raised by carers during this inspection in relation to carer payments.

Management

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)
- 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)

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 25.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The Fostering Service has a Management and Staff Team who evidence a commitment to positive outcomes for children and young people and to supporting carers well.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

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. Two children's packs, one specifically for younger children, provide information about being fostered with Compass.

The management structure of the agency is clear, with active involvement of the Directors. There is a clear career structure for staff in all areas of operation with robust systems for support, supervision and appraisal.

Active Personnel Management Limited has recently carried out a Staff Attitude Survey of Compass staff to secure the views of staff on a range of agency practices around support, training, health and safety and equality and diversity. The results were examined during the inspection and generally demonstrated very positive staff attitudes.

The agency has a commendable commitment to foster carer training. Carers have access to a comprehensive training programme with courses provided by appropriately experienced agency staff and by external experts. There is also a designated budget allowing carers and staff to access external training opportunities. Carers spoken to and those returning questionnaires rated training highly: 'Compass provides me with excellent support, training and career opportunities'.

The Training and Development Officer has developed an excellent induction programme for carers, which was viewed during this inspection, and is completed by carers during their probationary period and is based on the Skills for Care standards. The range of workbooks covers children's rights, equality and diversity, health, safe care, child protection and health and safety. Their focus on competencies leads well into the National Vocational Qualification training programme.

All carers and staff have a Personal development Plan, which identifies any training needs and clarifies how these will be met.

The agency's expansion over its ten years of operation has been a gradual process with carers now recruited over several Midlands counties. The agency endeavours to recruit carers in geographical 'cells' and six local support groups now cover different geographical areas. Expansion has always been accompanied by appropriate staff recruitment. Supervising Social Workers are

generally allocated to supervise carers in a specific geographical area and are closely involved in facilitating the support group in that area.

Form F assessments examined during this inspection were completed to a good standard with a strong focus on carer skills and competencies and a clear identification of areas for development.

There have been notable improvements since the previous inspection in 'team spirit' and in consistency of recording practices. The Directors additionally told the inspector that they were working consistently to establish strong working relationships with placing authorities, based on clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and close monitoring of the fulfilment of statutory responsibilities, to continuously improve outcomes for young people.

Foster carers responding to questionnaires largely rated the support provided by the agency as excellent: 'Compass fully support me and are always available 24 hours a day'; 'Staff work together as a team to meet carers needs'.

Foster carers receive four-monthly recorded supervision to a comprehensive agenda and additionally they receive fortnightly visits. The inspector has suggested that some means of differentiating supervision visits from contact visits, on the FosterTrack system, be adopted.

The annual review process for carers is clear and reviews are carried out at appropriate intervals. Carer approval status is clearly defined.

At the time of this inspection no exemptions to the normal fostering limit were in place.

The Carer's Handbook contains a good range of guidance and information for carers and is regularly reviewed and updated.

Both carers and staff are actively involved in the development of agency policy and practice with representatives involved in the Training Steering Group and the Practice Consultation Group. A Fostering Development Group meeting is additionally held twice a year for all staff and carers. Both Directors are closely involved with all carers, making an annual visit to all foster homes, meeting regularly with local groups and taking on direct challenges from the local carer support groups to compete in sporting activities.

Carers also receive good information through the 'Compass Points' and 'The Squirrel' publications.

There have been considerable developments since the previous inspection to FosterTrack, the agency's database and electronic recording system.

Records relating to both carers and young people were much more easily accessed than during the previous inspection. Some paper records are still retained and these include a commendably detailed front sheet, which fully clarifies what information is included in the file, what is stored electronically and what information is currently being chased from placing authorities.

The agency is commended on being very pro-active in chasing essential information relating to young people placed and on the development of a system of different coloured files for young people to show which are incomplete.

There was clear evidence on the files tracked that, in addition to working to ensure that all Looked After Children documentation is secured in relation to current placements, the agency is going through files of young people already in placement to chase up to date documentation from placing authorities.

There is robust administrative support provided by workers who have specific allocated tasks and the Administration Service Manager was observed to have an excellent knowledge of all areas of agency operation and to provide a high level of support to staff in all areas, particularly in respect of recording practices and use of FosterTrack.

Expectations in relation to carer recording are clearly stated and well supported by training and monitoring by Supervising Social Workers. All carers visited were storing information securely.

Carers visited were retaining good records of placement. Carer's four monthly returns provide an excellent means of monitoring how well young people are being supported to achieve the five outcomes and copies of these are provided to placing authorities.

All young people visited were being encouraged to keep memorabilia and some had already completed life story work.

The agency retains good records of concerns, complaints and allegations but has serious concerns, which it has represented to both placing authorities and the Commission for Social Care Inspection, about the time taken by many placing authorities to notify the outcome of investigations of allegations against foster carers. This was evidenced in relation to one of the carers tracked,

where the carer had been verbally told the outcome of an investigation by the placing authority but the agency had not received notification.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	4
15	4
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	4
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	2

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	4
29	4

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	4
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	4
22	X
23	4
24	4
25	3
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	N/A

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS11	The agency should evidence that young people are more robustly supported to represent their wishes and feelings and that appropriate advocacy is secured to ensure that their views are fully considered by their placing authority.

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