

# Croham Independent Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Peter Daniel
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	26 September 2008

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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**

Croham Independent Fostering Agency meets a range of placement needs for children and young people, including sibling groups and mothers and babies. The agency has an experienced management group. It is based in South Croydon and near good rail, bus and tram connections. The agency receives referrals from London Boroughs and the home counties. The agency has recently been transferred to new ownership.

### **Summary**

Croham Fostering Agency has been under new ownership for a year. The agency is a well run service and is effectively managed. Staff and foster carers are providing a child centred service. Foster carers are fully supported and are meeting the overall needs of the children in the placement. There is a robust fostering panel. The overall impression is that Croham is an organisation committed to achieving good standards and developing a culture of improvement. There are, however, some minor shortfalls in relation foster carer checks, panel membership and staff training.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Since the last inspection Croham Fostering Agency has been taken over by new owners. The agency has a newly established staff group and has some of the previous staff and the majority of foster carers. The transition has been fairly 'seamless'. The agency now has two Supervising Social Workers in response to the need to offer regular supervision and support to its foster carers. The agency has produced a new child protection policy. The fostering panel has been re-constituted and has a new membership. Staff have commented on improvements in management, who are assuming a more involved, 'hands on' approach. Similarly, foster carers have reported improved communication from management via regular support groups and a bi-monthly newsletter.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The agency promotes the health and development of children in placement to a good standard. Each child and/or young person is receiving health care which meets his/her needs. Children are registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician and all appropriate health checks, medicals and immunisations are undertaken. Children have been referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Speech Therapist, as appropriate. Foster carers are providing balanced diets and promoting healthy eating. Some children are offered life story work. Foster carers have attended training in first aid and safe caring. Health and safety checks of the foster home are up to date. The Fostering Panel has been re-constituted and includes one member who has a nursing background.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

The agency has updated its Safeguarding Protection Policy.

The agency has sound recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff, foster carers and fostering panel members. This ensures that children are effectively safeguarded. Staff files showed that appropriate checks and references are in place. However, checks of a foster carer's file showed one Criminal Record Bureau check was overdue for renewal. This was not down to a failure of the system but because the agency had not taken a robust approach with a foster carer. The agency has since taken appropriate action. Nevertheless, a recommendation has been included to ensure that Criminal Record Bureau checks and renewals are given the highest priority in future.

The agency has provided relevant training in safeguarding, to ensure the ongoing safety of children/young people. Foster carers have attended training in first aid, safe caring and safeguarding. Furthermore, the agency has carried out appropriate safety monitoring including unannounced visits, annual reviews and health and safety checks. The agency ensures that during visits by supervising social workers the child is seen alone. There have been no referrals of a 'safeguarding' nature since the previous inspection.

The agency has its own referral form to assist with matching of children to placement and case files evidence that children were matched appropriately.

The fostering panel has been re-constituted as previous members had served their term of office. There is a new chairperson and membership that includes ethnic minority representation. The chair is experienced in matters of fostering. The membership is also experienced and includes representation from Croham Fostering, two foster carers, a former nurse, an ex-young person in care, a residential home manager and an administrator. The agency plans to recruit two more members. The Registered Provider ensures that all panel members undergo police checks and produce references. The panel is still looking for a representative with an expertise in education; a recommendation has been included to this effect. The panel meets quarterly; it last held a training day in September 2008. The fostering panel provides a quality assurance function in the assessment process in relation to annual reviews. All reports and information are of a good standard. Members demonstrated robust questioning as part of their function in monitoring and reviewing the work of the assessors. The chair provided excellent chairing skills and her recommendations of the terms of approval for each carer were clear and concise.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

The agency, through its foster carers, is actively involved in promoting educational achievement. Foster carers escort children and liaise with nurseries and schools, enrol children in after school clubs and attend Personal Education Planning meetings and parent evenings. Young people are being encouraged to take part in social activities including attending the library, singing, drama, swimming, shopping and family trips.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

The agency encourages children and young people to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships. Foster carers facilitate direct contact with birth families at contact centres or at the family home. Telephone contact is also encouraged as appropriate. The agency also promotes consultation and ensures that the opinions and views of children are heard. The service now offers contact facilities for children in Croham Foster placements. Children and

young people are attending their own reviews where they have the opportunity to express their wishes and feelings. Children in placement receive a Children's Guide that gives information on how to complain

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

New owners took over Croham Fostering Agency just over a year ago. The latter have long-standing experience in social work and fostering and/or providing a fostering service. The foster carers and staff have been retained and there has been a virtually 'seamless' transition under the new ownership. The agency's Statement of Purpose has been updated.

The staff composition includes the Registered Provider who supervises the Team Manager and has a development role, a Registered Team Manager, who has NVQ 4 management qualification, two Supervising Social Workers who are qualified, a Contact Co-ordinator, two art workers who are part-time, and two administration staff who job share. The latter cover the administration of the foster panel.

The agency is currently supporting 17 foster carers who are caring for 13 children. At the time of the inspection five families are without placements. The agency is currently running a preparation group for six applicants and is undertaking three assessments out of this group. There are four additional assessments in the pipeline.

Staff meetings are held fortnightly. Staff reported satisfaction about being consulted and supported by management and there appeared to be good morale. The management style is 'hands on'. Staff have done recent BAAF training in supervision of foster carers and an internal workshop on Form F's. Administration staff have not had any training and it is recommended that their training needs are reviewed.

The promotion by the agency of equality and diversity is good. The agency gives priority to training its foster carers and offers monthly training. It is developing a programme under the Children's Workforce Development Council. Each foster carer receives a training programme for the year. Courses offered so far include: effective communication with children and young people; safe caring; managing difficult behaviour; undertaking life story work; fostering unaccompanied asylum seeking children; transitions and endings; record keeping and attending court. Foster carers have been encouraged to do NVQ training. To date 15 out of the 17 foster carers have completed this training; the remainder will also be doing so.

Foster carers are well supported by the agency and receive monthly formal supervision. They also attend a support group held every three months. Foster carers receive a newsletter bi-monthly. The agency has put on social events at Easter, Summer, Halloween and Xmas. Foster carers mention how much they appreciate the regular newsletter.

The fostering agency's administrative and case records are in excellent order and contain all the relevant information to run the service. Records held on foster carer's and children's files are comprehensive and up to date. Since the last inspection there have only been two complaints of a minimal nature. These have been resolved in a timely fashion and signed off. No significant

incidents have been reported. The agency has systems for monitoring its practice, for example, the monitoring of annual reviews, unannounced visits, health and safety checks, foster carers diary sheets, supervision records and training records. The fostering panel also has a quality assurance role. The premises used by the fostering agency is suitable for the purpose of running a fostering service. Discussions with the providers confirmed the agency is financially sound.

## 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):

- ensure that Criminal Record Bureau checks are managed robustly - NMS 15.4
- ensure that the independent members of the fostering panel include as far as possible expertise in education - NMS 30.8
- ensure the effectiveness of training programmes for staff, including administration staff, is routinely evaluated and training programmes are updated annually - NMS 19.1 and 19.2