

Croham Services For Children

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Croham Services for Children is a private business enterprise with a community ethos. It provides a range of services that include fostering, a contact centre, an art service, parenting programmes, training, room hire for therapists, and a lease of the building for a residential care establishment for adults. Its fostering service aims to meet a range of placement needs for children and young people, including sibling groups and mothers and babies. The fostering service receives referrals from various London boroughs and the Home Counties. It currently has 20 approved fostering households and provides placements for 19 children and young people.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

The service is outstandingly effective at ensuring that foster children are consistently provided with a safe, caring and stimulating family environment. The service truly enhances the quality of children's lives and their life chances. The placing authorities are exceedingly positive about the agency's matching process and the ability to deliver the agreed care plans. The placements are extraordinarily successful. The permanency and the stability of the placements are exceptionally well supported. To the delight of everybody involved, when the plans changed, some placements have led to successful adoptions. The service is also exceptionally good at nurturing constructive contact and preparing children to reunite with their families when that is

appropriate.

Carefully selected foster carers receive excellent support and training from the highly dedicated, experienced and competent fostering team. Foster carers are enabled to effectively carry out their role to the highest professional standard. Carers are extremely motivated to provide the best for their foster children, including after they have left the care system.

The care children receive is highly personalised and addresses their needs exceptionally well. The service encourages children to have high aspirations and provides them with comprehensive support to develop a positive self-view and build their confidence.

The leaders and managers are very effective at inspiring and enabling staff and carers to achieve the exceptionally high professional standards in their work. A strong awareness of the legislative framework within the service is complemented with a strong reflective and learning culture. Above all, developing better social care practice and achieving better outcomes for children remains the driving passion of this service. Working together with other stakeholders, leaders continue to explore and achieve imaginative and innovative ways to provide a better service for children. They are also very keen to share what they have learnt with other professionals. Through providing training and presentations, they make significant contributions to the improvement of the knowledge within the wider social care community. Another exceptional feature of the directors' management style is leading by example and demonstrating in practice how in-depth knowledge of legislation and comprehensive theoretical understanding enhance the care for children. Although unmistakably outstanding, the service has extensive ideas for improvement and clear written development plans.

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Children are making outstanding progress across different aspects of their development. They experience the stability of family life and authentic emotional warmth. While having constructive contact with their birth families, they have formed strong, safe and realistic attachments with their carers and other children in the household. They understand the reasons for being in care. They feel enabled to contribute to the decision-making process concerning their lives and their birth families. They feel enabled to say how they feel and know that their views count. They are exceptionally happy with the current arrangements for their care, and report being looked after by their carers especially well. They feel being a part of a family and have a very enjoyable childhood. This gives them confidence and enables them to look positively into the future. They lead active lives and engage in a wide range of leisure, sporting and fun activities with their carers and other children. They are encouraged to eat well, to understand what is good for them and to develop healthy lifestyles. Those children with diagnosed medical conditions are well supported to learn how to manage this successfully and how to gradually take the

increasing levels of responsibility for managing their own health and behaviour.

All children of compulsory school age have identified education placements. Their school attendance has significantly improved since they have been fostered through this service and is now excellent. Their educational achievements are very considerable. For example, children who were consistently underperforming in the past are now on target to meet or exceed the national end of stage tests for their year. A child has secured a place at one of the 10 top grammar schools in the country. Another young person who continues to receive support under staying put arrangements has started university. Other young people are planning to study at a university and are working towards that.

In addition to their academic achievements, children and young people have excellent opportunities to explore their artistic talents and broaden the ways in which they express themselves. A number of them are involved in visual arts, craft, dancing, drama and music. A young person says that the art at Croham Services for Children is such fun that she does not stop laughing when she is at the art room. Foster carers report deriving great comfort and feeling overjoyed when hearing the happy giggles and laughter coming from the art room, while they wait to collect their foster and birth children. Croham Services for Children publishes a calendar each year with high quality children's art work. A copy is sent to the Queen and the letters of thanks by Her Royal Majesty's office are framed and displayed for everybody to see.

Children love coming to the offices of Croham Services for Children. They see their art work tastefully displayed and are constantly reminded that they and their work are worthy of admiration and praise. They enjoy attending the service's parties where they get to know other children and carers. This includes those carers who provide respite care for them when it is needed. Foster carers talk about the fostering service being like one big family.

Children have excellent opportunities to develop their social skills. They feel supported, respected and loved by many people and their confidence is steadily growing. Children and young people are making exceptional progress in developing a range of skills to prepare them for adulthood. Children from minority ethnic groups, including unaccompanied asylum seekers, have good opportunities to learn about the British way of living and achieve integration into the British society. The service also makes a special effort to ensure that those children have their cultural and religious needs met and that they have excellent opportunities to develop relationships with people from their own background.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Adults and children describe Croham Services for Children as special. In addition to the usual aspects of fostering that are delivered to an exceptionally high standard, other services are also offered in-house. This includes an extraordinarily successful

art service and a contact centre that is run very sensitively and safely in a creative, comfortable and most supportive environment. The management has also developed excellent working relationships with psychotherapists, who can hire rooms to provide their service to children in the same building. With the agreement of the children's social workers, supervising social workers are supporting foster carers to contribute to the life story work. All these extra services have stemmed from the company's unwavering commitment to a holistic and individualised approach to care. The other professionals from the social care field say that Croham Services for Children are 'achieving an additional value'; 'nothing is too much for them'; 'they are always going a bit further'; 'always making an extra effort to provide the best for children'; and 'always going an extra mile'.

Foster carers are also exceptionally positive about the management of the service and the support and training they receive. Foster carers know that they are highly respected and valued members of the team and feel enabled to take full part in all planning for the child. They receive comprehensive information about the child before and during the placement. They are supported to understand and sensitively manage their constructive relationships with the children's social workers, especially if the information they feel they need from the placing authority is not forthcoming. In addition to the training and developmental opportunities for foster carers that are usually offered by the good fostering services, the management of Croham Services for Children has the expertise to competently provide bespoke training that takes fully into account the individual needs of the foster carer and the child. Extra support in terms of excellent childcare arrangements is also available to enable foster carers to attend the training.

The service values learning highly, and provides successful work experience for young people. They are given tasks that also reflect the service's commitment to enabling young people to contribute much more fully to the development of Croham Services for Children. For example, young people led on developing an evaluation of the art service form and are currently involved in establishing and facilitating a group for young women. Young people's involvement helps them to develop confidence, a sense of responsibility and achievement, professional attitudes and leadership skills.

The fostering panel is appropriately constituted and has a multidisciplinary membership including young adults who have had a direct experience of being in care. Under the leadership of a very experienced panel chair, the panel contributes effectively to driving the quality of the service forward. The panel provides thorough and rigorous scrutiny of the approval and review of foster carers. The director who is the decision maker has a desired distance from the day-to-day management of the service, as well as the closeness to his heart of the success of the service in providing only the best for children. This, together with this person's enormous experience and expertise in the field of social care, adds another layer of robustness and quality to the functioning of Croham Services for Children.

Croham Services for Children has developed a formidable reputation among social workers, foster carers and children. These are some of the words they use to describe their experience of the service: 'excellent', 'consistently of the very high

standard', 'extraordinarily good', 'reliable', 'cannot be faulted on anything', 'brilliant', 'hugely supportive', 'fabulous', 'fantastic', 'wonderful', 'great', 'caring', 'welcoming', 'friendly', 'personal', 'family-orientated', 'unique', and 'very special'. A child's social worker wrote to the service: 'The support has been invaluable. I have really valued our working together. It has been an example of good practice.' One of the professionals external to the service describes the directors of Croham Services for Children as 'beacons of professional integrity and expertise in social care'.

Children thrive in this service. They value the support they receive exceptionally highly. They have developed a strong sense of unreserved trust in their carers and fostering staff. They say that there is nothing else that the foster carers or foster staff can do better or differently. Children feel respected for who they are and are clear that they receive the best care that there is. When asked to rate the fostering service overall on the scale from one to 10 with 10 being the highest, the average mark was 9.6. Those children who did not mark the service as 10 were eager to explain that they would not give 10 to anyone. Other children who were not part of this particular exercise also indicated having an extraordinarily high level of satisfaction with the service.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Promotion of children's welfare and safeguarding children are intrinsic to all aspects of the service provision. Scrutiny and rigour of assessments; comprehensive training; frequent supervision of foster carers that includes regular conversations with the child; careful evaluation of the relationship between the foster carer and the child; and unannounced visits keep the service's focus unmistakably on safeguarding and child protection.

Staff and foster carers have an up-to-date knowledge of good safeguarding practice and are able to follow it. The service pays keen attention to electronic safety. Foster carers have a very comprehensive written guidance and receive specific training from the foster carer who has a particular interest and in-depth knowledge of this subject. Any safeguarding concerns and allegations are handled promptly, robustly, sensitively and within an effective working together agenda.

Children and young people are safe. They have developed a strong sense of safety and security. They trust their carers and the service's staff and management. They know how to complain and report having many adults who they can speak to, if worried about anything. They do not feel pressurised or intimidated in any way, or bullied. They are confident that the adults around them wish them only the best. Children respond positively to the care received and feel increasingly enabled to openly talk, even about the painful experiences from their past. Foster carers have a clear understanding of the potential impact of abuse or neglect that a child might have experienced, and advocate passionately for the child to receive all appropriate help available. Children's files contain written individual risk assessments that promote the practice that encourages safer behaviour. The service is making

significant efforts to decrease the number of incidents when young people are missing from the placement.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Leaders and managers of this service have an extraordinarily strong vision of perfected fostering practice that achieves outstanding outcomes for each child. The directors, one of whom is the Registered Manager, have exceptional levels of experience and expertise in the social care field and meticulous knowledge of the associated legislation. Their commitment to running the service that fully satisfies government guidance is complemented by a tireless drive to consistently exceed what is usually considered good practice. The attitude that 'only the best is good enough' runs seamlessly through different levels of the service delivery and drives improvement. A keen interest in legislation, research and developments in the sector plays a vital part in the delivery of this service. Highly accomplished and enthusiastically dedicated social workers with many years of post-qualifying experience are proud to be working for Croham Services for Children. It provides them with a stimulating learning environment and successfully supports their professional development. They receive professional supervision and direction of a very high quality. Through exceptionally detailed written guidance and excellent support and training opportunities for foster carers, the up-to-date knowledge is disseminated to them and impacts positively on their practice.

The management is closely involved in the delivery of the actual social work tasks and know all foster carers and children exceptionally well. Foster carers value this immensely. They say that if they contact the service at any time of the day or night, somebody who they know and who knows them and the child really well will be genuinely available to listen and provide support. Foster carers say that they would not work for any other fostering service. Those who worked for other good fostering services previously, say that Croham Services for Children are so much better than those services, that it is beyond compare. Foster carers, staff and management say that everybody is working together as a team. The service has managed to create a cohesive fostering community that is united by the passion to provide the best care for children. The service competently works together with the placing authorities and other partner agencies to support effective corporate parenting. The service is exceptionally successful at promoting and achieving outstanding outcomes for children. The placing authorities say that they only have the highest regard for the management of this service.

In addition to monitoring the quality of the service by working alongside social workers and engaging in frequent individual and group supervision meetings with them, the directors meet on a monthly basis. These board meetings are used to discuss the business matters and ensure that the management has a clear overview of the functioning of the services. Detailed performance framework indicators have been developed to capture the extent and the quality of the service including measuring a wide range of outcomes for children. The service publishes annual

reports and has clearly defined action plans in place, as well as short and long-term development plans that are based on comprehensive evaluation of the provision. Staff, foster carers and children feel listened to and well supported to contribute to the development of the service.

All recommendations from the previous inspection report have been fully implemented. Other significant achievements have been made, such as increased staffing levels, better recording in many ways and in particular of the supervising visits, and development of other services to strengthen and widen the holistic support for children.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.