

Croham Services For Children

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number SC374594
Inspection date 30/11/2015
Inspector Seka Graovac
Type of inspection Full
Provision subtype

Setting address 45 Croham Road, SOUTH CROYDON, Surrey, CR2 7HD

Telephone number 0208 4065300
Email cbrann@croham.co.uk
Registered person Croham Services For Children Limited
Registered Manager Christopher Brann
Responsible individual Laura Ritchie
Date of last inspection 11/06/2012

© Crown copyright 2015

Website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

Croham Services for Children is a private business enterprise with a community ethos. Ofsted registered its fostering service in 2008. The organisation provides a range of other services. 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 18 approved fostering families consisting of 26 carers. It has a capacity to provide 31 placements and currently has 25 children placed.

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

Leaders and managers are ambitious, inspirational and highly competent. They have a breadth of knowledge, as well as a sharp eye for emotional and cognitive details. They have developed and implemented comprehensive systems, policies, procedures and processes that fully comply with legislation, statutory guidance and the Ofsted inspection framework. They robustly promote and consistently achieve excellent fostering practice.

The agency is outstanding due to its unwavering commitment to putting children first and strong advocacy on their behalf. Hallmarks of this outstanding service include high levels of professionalism, striving for perfection and exceeding the characteristics of good, continued learning and improvement, sharing knowledge and building communities, transparency and communication, dynamic risk management, mindfulness, creativity and insightful judgement-making.

Robustly vetted, genuinely caring and highly skilled foster carers provide children with a safe, positive and supportive family environment. Having a loving home and order in their lives enables children to develop a deep sense of belonging, safety and security. From feeling valued for who they are, they grow in confidence and are open to new experiences, learning and development. They thrive as individuals and make exceptional progress in their health, social, emotional and educational development and achievement.

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Children have exceptionally positive fostering experiences through Croham Services for Children. At the inspection, they unanimously score the agency as '10 out of 10'. They explain that the agency was outstanding because it gave them a home and 'made all children happy'. They said that from the very beginning, the agency and the foster-family made them feel very welcomed, valued, fully included and equal to birth children. Many of them emphasised that the agency brought a sense of normality into their lives. This is a feeling that they had not had in the past and had longed for, before they found it.

Children have excellent opportunities to experience a positive family life. They have formed healthy attachments with all family members. Many of them call their foster carers 'mum and dad'. A young person says that she was very pleased to have finally, after many broken placements, found a true home for herself with mum and dad in it. Children also talk lovingly about their 'new brothers and sisters'. A fostered young person showed great sensitivity, empathy and emotional insight while talking about how it must have felt for a birth child to be sharing their mum and dad for the first time. All foster family members talked of how the fostering experience enriched their lives in different ways.

Children experience stability in their lives. They develop a strong sense of belonging. They remain with their foster families as long as they need to. This includes effective 'staying put' arrangements. Over the years, many children stayed with the families under special guardianship orders and the people who were initially their foster carers have adopted some.

Children have a wide range of formal and informal learning opportunities. They lead active lives and engage in a wide range of recreational activities that promote their health, social skills, community integration and general learning. All of them are in education. Their school attendance is consistently very high. Taking into account their starting points, their educational engagement and attainment are exceptional. They have developed confidence that they can do well in life. They have high aspirations for their future and work towards achieving this. They feel comfortable asking the foster carers for help with anything they need. A young person said that her foster carer was the only one who noticed that she had a special learning need and helped her to develop specific remedial strategies. The young person was able to overcome the difficulty and obtain a vocational certificate with a distinction. There are many other examples of children making excellent progress. A clinical psychologist wrote in her report that the child's speaking improved significantly due to the foster carer's dedication to playing and communicating.

Children thrive and blossom in their placements. They make tremendous progress across all areas of their development and welfare. The agency's art service outstandingly promotes children's creativity. It diversifies their means of expression and strengthens their self-awareness, self-esteem, confidence and general knowledge. A recent talent show in which children, carers and staff presented their creativity in different media was great entertainment for everyone, but also a wonderful opportunity to celebrate

achievements and to practice performance skills. A child said that the agency helped her and others to come out of their shells, to feel more valued and to be more connected.

In consultation with children and carers, the agency has organised a number of other fun events, such as barbeques, quizzes and firework displays. Children love coming to the office. They have unofficially named it 'Harry Potter House'. A children's guide with a quirky painting of the agency's building, plus regular newsletters provide clear information about the service and of any special events.

Children's beautiful artwork decorate the walls of the agency. Children enjoy having a healthy sense of pride that fuels their aspirations and a positive mind-set that says, 'I am worth it.'

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The agency's culture of high aspirations and the systems that are in place for preparation, assessment, support, supervision, review and training of foster carers consistently promote a high quality fostering practice. Through its quality assurance functions, the agency's robust fostering panel makes significant contributions towards ensuring the high quality. Close partnership with other services, excellent matching, high quality support and the frequency of supervisory and other visits to foster families successfully underpin the high effectiveness and stability of the placements.

The leaders and managers have a proven expertise in designing and delivering training. They provide foster carers with wide-ranging and bespoke tailored training that specifically addresses their needs and incorporates the latest developments in social care research and practice. Nearly all foster carers have attained training, support and development standards. Two thirds of fostering households have additional relevant qualifications, such as National Vocational and social work qualifications.

Foster carers have genuinely caring attitudes. They are highly committed to providing the best support for children in a positive and inclusive family environment. They are excellent advocates for children. A foster carer summed up her feelings about fostering as 'she is now our child and will always be that. Everybody we fostered has touched our lives and have become our family'. Even foster children's friends come to the foster carers for advice and support. This relationship has on one occasion led to an additional fostering arrangement with the local authority.

Foster carers are highly competent in their roles. They have an excellent understanding of children who live away from their families. They are able to meet the needs of children in their care; this includes helping children with highly complex needs and challenging behaviours to move forward in their lives. They have developed a wide range of skills that they creatively use to address any barriers to children's progress. They are effective at promoting children's excellent outcomes.

Foster carers work in close partnership with social workers, other professionals and children's parents. Foster carers' contributions to children's lives are highly valued. A parent says that the foster carers were excellent. A teacher comments that the foster carers were exceptional at promoting children's academic and extra-curricular progress. A placement officer and an independent reviewing officer highlighted the foster carers' input into the statutory review process and the quality of their reports as high and particularly helpful. The following citations are from a clinical psychologist's letter to carers: 'He is very fortunate to have such thoughtful, child-focused carers. In such a short time, he has built a relationship with you and your children. He is slowly learning that adults can be predictable, consistent, trustworthy and loving.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Excellent safeguarding practice is throughout all aspects of the fostering service. The careful recruitment of foster carers, staff and panel members, the up-to-date training and the comprehensive support, enabling supervision and on-going scrutiny of practice have resulted in the robust protection of children.

Safeguarding children in all aspects of their lives is everybody's business. One foster carer with a particular interest and specialist knowledge in online safety has taken a lead in this crucial area of safeguarding. She has delivered training to foster carers. Clear understanding and identifications of risks, and comprehensive risk management that includes a dynamic review of its effectiveness underpin the strong safeguarding practice. Foster carers have excellent understanding of the impact of neglect and abuse on children. They fully recognise the effects that children's past experiences bring to their lives. They are skilled at helping children to develop high safeguarding awareness and ethical discernment. They use every opportunity to offer a listening ear to children and to teach them how to be safe. While enabling children to expand their experiences, carers always explain the risks and let children know about protective strategies that they can use to enhance their safety in various situations.

Trusting and close relationships between foster carers and children contribute to the agency's exceptionally positive impact on children's safety. Children have developed a deeply seated sense of safety and security. They know that they have a right to be safe. They know that what happens to them matters. They have developed confidence and improved their assertiveness and resilience. They can recognise abusive relationships for what they are and begin to move on. They are comfortable about seeking help and following professional advice. They have developed close relationships not only with their foster families, but with the whole agency. They know all staff and managers by their names and feel comfortable approaching them and talking with them. They describe the agency's manager as having a great sense of humour. They say that he made everything 'light' and that it is very easy to talk with him about anything. They feel listened to and their views taken seriously.

An embedded culture of open and honest communication throughout the provision exists. The agency works closely with the police, social and health services, and when relevant,

the designated officer for child protection and the fire services to ensure protection and to promote children's safety. The protocols for information sharing and partnership working are effective. A father comments that his daughter was 100% safe with her carers.

There are no current concerns regarding the risks of radicalisation, child sexual exploitation or any other safeguarding issues. The children who used to go missing have stopped doing so. The last time the agency had a missing child incident was in March 2015. There have been no accidents resulting in an injury.

Children's behaviour is of a very high standard. They see the benefit of having order in their lives and make efforts to follow any agreed rules. They describe their carers as being at the same time firm and loving. They identify this balance as one of the most important factors that has enabled them to feel secure, to take more responsibility for their behaviour, to make safer choices and to be safe.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The leaders and managers have a strong vision for the service in which children are always at the heart. Through comprehensive and highly developed systems and processes, they have fully embedded child-focused care in the service. The value-based approach has resulted in the exceptionally positive outcomes for children.

The leaders and managers exercise their responsibilities with great integrity, expertise, competence and care. An appropriately qualified and highly experienced Registered Manager has been in his post since 2012. He has set exceptionally high expectations regarding the standard of work, as well as created a supportive and enabling working environment.

Each person on the agency's social work team has extensive experience of working with children. The least experienced social worker has over 23 years of post-qualifying social work experience. The agency's exceptional effectiveness and the meticulously kept records clearly demonstrate decision making on all levels of the service with careful examination of facts, thoroughness, thoughtfulness and insight.

A strong learning culture complements well the team's high levels of professional experience and expertise. There is a fully embedded affinity towards learning across all its levels of functioning. The agency's social workers emphasise the excellent opportunities for eclectic learning that they have. The additional services that the agency provides to the wider community, such as advocacy, contact and training have created these additional opportunities for staff learning and development. The directors bring additional learning through their professional involvement in case auditing for local authorities, monitoring of the quality of residential care, serious case reviews and publishing guides to interpret legislation. Foster carers describe the training they receive as highly informative, relevant and stimulating. They enjoy learning and have successfully nurtured children's natural curiosity into love for learning.

The thorough understanding of legislation and the commitment to regulatory compliance are also among the agency's intrinsic characteristics. Staff and foster carers have a good working knowledge of legislation; even children mentioned the fostering regulations and spontaneously talked about the role that the record keeping has in safeguarding children. They have developed good understanding of the importance of following a rule of law and with it, a commitment to be law-abiding citizens.

The promotion of creative thinking and creativity in all its forms is also high on the agency's agenda. Supervising social workers say that the managers always encouraged them to 'think out of the box' when looking for a solution to a problem. The examples include utilising a child's love for animals to initiate, extend and build on social interactions. The agency is supporting a child who imbues stones with deep personal meanings to explore further this idiosyncratic stone-language and gain deeper self-awareness.

Foster carers are exceptionally complimentary about the quality of the support that they receive from the agency. They say that the agency was always there for them. This included the out of hours support and on at least one occasion, an emergency, midnight visit. They describe the agency overall as being very friendly and highly professional. This is something that the local authority staff report as the real strength of the agency.

All stakeholders comment positively about the agency's administrative processes and general efficiency. Foster carers find that 'everything is always completed in a timely manner' and 'the cogs always went well'. When commenting about the flow of paperwork and meeting timescales, the panel chair who has experience of working with a number of different fostering services says that this agency is 'a dream to work with'.

The leaders and managers have excellent direct knowledge of each child and carefully monitor their progress. A comprehensive framework of meetings that includes regular staff supervision meetings, team meetings and management board meetings contributes to the good flow of information and robust quality assurance. The management has strengthened its monitoring function further by introducing a form that foster carers complete on a monthly basis. This enables a tighter overview and more specific monitoring of trends.

The agency's annual report demonstrates a strong improvement drive. Among many of the recent initiatives, the improved format for annual reviews of foster carers' approval has probably been the most significant practice development.

The agency is financially viable and well resourced. It is effective at fulfilling its community enterprise ethos that focuses on building communities to enhance the quality of children's lives and their life chances.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and 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.