

Coram Adoption and Permanent Families Service

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

Unique reference number	SC048496
Inspection date	22 October 2008
Inspector	Vivien Slyfield / Rosemary Chapman
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Coram Family 49 Mecklenburgh Square LONDON WC1N 2QA
Telephone number	020 7520 0350
Email	adoption@coram.org.uk
Registered person	Coram Family Adoption & Permanent Families Serv
Registered manager	Henriette Jeanne Kaniuk
Responsible individual	Henriette Jeanne Kaniuk
Date of last inspection	28 November 2005

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

The Thomas Coram Foundation has a long established tradition of innovative work with children. The original Foundling Hospital was founded in 1739 and from the start it has always provided substitute care for children. In 1955 it closed its residential provision and began to develop the range of services, which currently exist. These now include supported housing, family support, court assessments and the Adoption and Permanent Families Service. The adoption service includes recruitment, assessment and approval of domestic adopters, post adoption support, support to ex-foundlings and their families, the concurrent planning project and a unique service level agreement with the London Borough of Harrow. Work is undertaken in providing birth records counselling, intermediary services, support with contact arrangements and with managing reunions. The adoption service has a wide range of provision, which have the commitment of the whole of the Coram organisation, its governors and trustees.

Summary

This was an announced inspection during which all the key standards were considered. Coram recruits prepares, assesses adopters well. It is committed to supporting adoptive families both before and after the adoption order is made, through individual work, access to specialist advice, the provision of social events, support groups for adopters and children and through training. It is also committed to supporting birth relatives and adopted adults through its counselling, access to records and intermediary services, which are sensitive and professional. It has a strong commitment to the use of research in the development of good practice and makes effective use of specialist resources in supporting children and their adoptive families. There are knowledgeable, experienced and skilled staff at every level of the agency. Coram is clearly focused on the needs of children and in providing support to their families in maintaining secure and loving homes.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous inspection report identified three requirements and four recommendations. Two of the requirements are now met. Full medical information is provided in panel discussions and is part of the prospective adopter assessment. Suitable notifications have been made in relation to Schedule 4 VAA Regs 2003. It has been clarified that Coram does not need to notify the Registration Authority of child protection enquiries as it does not 'place' any children for adoption. There remains a concern in relation to checks on staff as there is no current CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check in place on one of the personnel files seen. Three of the recommendations are met. A record is made of adoption panel member's induction. Telephone verification is now routinely undertaken and recorded in relation to references for new staff. There is clear management audit of the files seen. The outstanding recommendation relates to panel membership of managers with case responsibility for matters presented to the panel. This relates to panels in the branches rather than in London. Coram continues to develop practice and work undertaken in the Concurrent Planning Project (CPP) and with the London Borough of Harrow is innovative and valuable.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There are clear written recruitment policies relating to the recruitment of adopters, which prioritise work with applicants who are identified as meeting the needs of children who need adoptive families. Well structured, accessible and professionally presented information is provided for prospective adopters. All the surveys received from adopters stated they had received information and that it was useful and informative. Coram acknowledge that they have a greater need of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) adopters. They have taken specific steps to address this through commissioning research, engaging a consultant and through direct contact with BME communities. Coram run regular Open Meetings, which provide those interested in adoption with information and guidance about adoption and the process involved for adopters and children. There is a very well structured 'Steps To Adoption' and information designed to help people make their decision about applying. Although an application is given to prospective adopters and can be accepted at this stage, the practice at Coram is that it is received by the agency after the preparation group, which differs from the Department for Education and Skills guidance. Staff are clear that an application may be taken before the preparation group, but the dataset provided showed that this rarely happens. The preparation training is well organised and covers the appropriate issues in preparing adopters for caring for children. Additional training is provided for those adopters interested in the Concurrent Planning Project (CPP). All the information received from adopters indicated they found the preparation useful. They referred to 'very detailed and professional training', said the 'training days were very helpful and informative' and some described it as 'excellent'. All the assessments seen are well written and constructed with clear social work analysis as an integral part of the report. Workers have started to use the Prospective Adopters Report format (PAR). Four references are taken in relation to joint applicants, two being from respective family members. Referees sign the record of their interview with the assessing social worker to confirm it's accuracy. Views are sought of children in the family and included in the body of the report. Coram's policy is now to check back over the past 10 years of residence by contacting the relevant local authority. This is not consistently evident on all the files seen. Similarly there is a comprehensive health and safety check-list in use, but it is not in place with all the assessments seen. Race and culture is fully addressed within the assessments. The same consideration is not consistently given to other diversity issues relating to disability, sexuality and religion. References are sought from employers but only in relation to seeking confirmation of employment rather than information relating to relevant disputes or disciplinary proceedings. It is positive to note the change in Coram's policy so that prospective adopters who smoke are not assessed with the expectation of a child under five being placed with them. Second opinion visits are undertaken and reports completed when there are particular issues to address. Applicants are invited to attend the adoption panel if they wish and are effectively prepared by the assessing social worker for this experience. The work of the adoption panel is underpinned by policies and procedures which govern its operation. However, the procedures in relation to conflicts of interest do not fully address the issue. In relation to the membership of the panel, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 state that at least three independent members are appointed to the panel but Coram has decided that there should be five independent members. The membership of the panel is appropriate for both a fostering and adoption panel. Coram

acknowledge the need to combine the membership for each panel to ensure that there are only 10 members, rather than having an additional member for the fostering matters. All the panel members have the appropriate checks in place and all have signed a confidentiality agreement. New panel members have an induction, observe a panel and there is an annual training day with the other Coram panel members. Within the last year there have been occasions when the panel was inquorate. Coram took appropriate action when this came to light and having taken legal advice reconsidered matters at an appropriately constituted panel. The panel observed was well organised and chaired effectively. Members were well prepared and made full contributions to panel discussions. However, there are times when the panel adviser oversteps the remit of the role, which is one of giving advice, rather than direct questioning of attendees. The panel minutes are well structured and clear. They give a full account of panel's considerations, the advice and recommendation. The identification of the panel member's role is not consistently clear and nor are the reasons for the recommendation. Conflicts of interest and the action taken in relation to these are not always identified and recorded. The agency decision is undertaken seriously, in a timely manner and having considered all the papers presented to the panel as well as the draft panel minutes. There is a clear focus on the needs of the child in the decision making process. There are systems in place to allow the decision maker to consult with a senior manager within the organisation and for the decision to be made in the decision maker's absence. Following approval adopters' details are entered on the National Adoption Register if there is no match available within the consortium. All the adopters who were consulted felt they had all the information available about their child before the match was made. Coram make every effort to gain all the relevant information, facilitating various meetings including life appreciations days/meetings when appropriate. The views of prospective adopters are sought about on-going contract but not about notifying the agency in the event of the child's death. Suitable checks and references were undertaken at the appointment of Coram's adoption manager and a current CRB is in place. Similarly there are appropriate checks, references and telephone verification of these in relation to the appointment of all established staff. This is not the case for a sessional worker who does not have a current CRB. This member of staff works at one of the branches but the central personnel section of Coram in London takes responsibility for renewing CRB checks. Coram has an established complaints procedure, which is working effectively in practice. There is evidence of complaints being investigated and appropriate action taken. Information about how to complain is available to all those who use Coram's services. Safeguarding procedures are in place and there is evidence of clear and effective communication when safeguarding issues have arisen. The procedures include guidance on issues of historical abuse. There is mandatory training in place for all staff in relation to child protection and Coram's safeguarding procedures.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There is a clear message from Coram that they value adopters and all that they bring to caring for children. They are committed to providing a cohesive system of support. This is reflected in the comprehensive range of support available to adopters and their families. Adopters talked of regular contact from their Coram worker, both pre and post order. An adopter commented in their survey '(we had) excellent support, regular visits, 'phone calls, excellent advice'. This is echoed by all the information received from adopters. Coram are innovative in their approach to support and draw on research and specialist resources to provide flexible services that respond to the needs of individuals. The range of services includes extended Webster-Stratton Parenting Courses, Study Days on a range of relevant topics, advice and information on welfare rights,

the use of Story Stems and a service level agreement with the Tavistock Clinic, which provides consultation within two weeks, six sessions and further sessions if assessed as necessary. On a less formal basis there is an annual picnic for adopters and all Coram staff, which maintains contact with adopters and their children and allows issues to be raised informally. Support for adopters is well established at Coram. Adopters talked of having contact and support from Coram over many years, in one case 21 years. This has bred a confidence in the service, which supports adopters in their parenting and allows their children to flourish. There is recognition from Coram that the needs of families change and they provide a flexible response to the current issues. One adopter wrote; 'over the last few years our children have reached teenage years and we have experienced many testing times. The staff at Coram have supported us through these times. They are always just a 'phone call away'. Coram has access to a range of specialist services some of which are innovative and creative. All the specialist advisers used are knowledgeable and well informed. There is effective use of legal and medical advisers both in assessment of prospective adopters and in consideration of children's details for matching. Again adopters commented that specialist advice is available to them. One adopter said that, Coram 'know where to go for particular expertise that they don't have in-house'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There is a clear and meaningful recognition of the lifelong implications of adoption and a strong commitment to providing support to all those involved at each stage of the adoption experience. Most of the responsibility for these standards rests with the relevant local authority. Coram have more direct involvement in work with birth families than many Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) through their work with the London Borough of Harrow (Harrow) and their Concurrent Planning Project (CPP). This unique arrangement with Harrow has been in place 18 months and its effectiveness is considered in the inspection of Harrow's adoption service, which was undertaken earlier this year. The arrangement means that Harrow delegate the responsibility for the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of domestic adopters to Coram, who are also responsible for family finding for Harrow children who have adoption as their plan. If Coram does not have an appropriate family, there is evidence which shows that other agencies are approached and their families considered. There is evidence that this arrangement has had a significant impact on meeting the needs of children in Harrow. Throughout their work Coram facilitate and encourage birth families to make significant contributions to their child's heritage. Within CPP workers are directly involved with birth parents and their families. The assessment work about rehabilitation runs alongside the child's placement with carers who are both foster carers and approved adopters. Within an open and honest relationship with birth families there is a recognition of the need for the child to retain information and memorabilia from their birth family. Staff actively encourage the collection of appropriate material and information. They have instigated a Naming Ceremony event, which allows birth parents to name their child in a meaningful way. Coram staff work effectively with placing authorities both pre and post adoption order in gaining the information needed by the child. Coram staff will directly manage contact arrangements where appropriate. This work is done with skill and sensitivity. They also take over indirect letter-box exchanges to ensure that the contact is maintained between birth families and their children. The CPP team continue their supportive relationship with birth families to enable and encourage contact. There are examples of Coram workers supporting a child in renewing direct contact with their birth their birth siblings. If there is a need to revisit or re-do life-story work and books, Coram workers undertake the work. Adopters met demonstrate an empathy and understanding of the position of birth families and value their

contribution to their child's heritage. Coram undertakes work with adopted adults and draws on the agency's historical perspective in understanding the significance of assisting adults in making sense of their past. Sensitivity and professionalism encapsulates Coram's approach to valuing and recognising the significance of birth heritage. Coram greatly value all aspects of a child's heritage. They take very seriously the welfare of all parties and work sensitively with reunions and contacts. As one worker said, 'Coram take tremendous responsibility for their (birth families) vulnerability' Coram has access to a range of specialist services some of which are innovative and creative. All the specialist advisers used are knowledgeable and well informed. There is effective use of legal and medical advisers both in assessment of prospective adopters and in consideration of children's details for matching.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a comprehensive statement of purpose in place, which relates to the whole of Coram's adoption service. It fully complies with the regulations and provides useful information for those considering using Coram's services. A children's guide is in place in line with the agency's responsibility as a provider of adoption support services. It is aimed at children who are able to read and make sense of written information. It does not include all the necessary information, lacking the contact details of the Children's Right's Director and an independent advocate. The children's guide is made available in other formats and languages if needed. The information for prospective adopters is well presented, informative and professional. It makes clear that Coram prioritise assessments of prospective adopters on the basis of the needs of children and provides accessible information for possible applicants who are deciding about adoption. Coram acknowledge that there are shortfalls in the management qualification of the adoption manager. Due to the specific circumstances this is unlikely to be addressed in the short term. One of the branch manager does hold an appropriate management qualification. However, the adoption manager has a wealth of skills, knowledge and experience, which is an asset to the organisation. The agency is well managed. There are clear and effective lines of communication and roles and responsibilities are well stated. Managers are fully involved in the day to day operation of the agency. They readily accept case management responsibility when a social worker is unavailable. They have comprehensive and detailed knowledge of cases from their rigorous monitoring of all case-notes. This is a noteworthy example of the use of monitoring as an effective tool. Adopters see Coram as being consistently well managed. One adopter wrote 'We've had contact with Coram over 30 years... in spite of staff changes there is still a sense of continuity.' Staff are organised and managed effectively. They feel well supported by the management structure and by their managers. There is an acknowledgement that there has been uncertainty in recent years but staff have remained committed throughout these difficulties. Staff value the regular and accessible supervision. The involvement of the team, informally and formally, in consultation and peer supervision is highly valued. There are sufficient staff to undertake their work. Staff have manageable caseloads and shortfalls in staffing are recognised and appropriately addressed. Administrative staff are a well established part of the team. They feel well resourced and valued by the social workers and organisation. Training and induction is used by all staff. The training is relevant and suitable for staff with their level of knowledge and experience. There is in-house training and external training which allows the development of a range of skills, including story stems, the Webster-Stratton parenting and

attachment. Training is of a high quality and allows the development of an impressive range of skills and expertise. There is direct and well informed use of research, which is used effectively to develop practice. Some of this work is ground breaking and innovative. Research and training is supported at every level of the organisation. Staff are positive about the experience of working for Coram. They feel that as an employer Coram takes into account their individual circumstances and facilitates flexible working. Coram is seen as a 'can do organisation'. Staff feel valued by Coram. One social worker said, 'we are treated as professional, given autonomy, respected and valued'. The records kept of children and adopters are well ordered and organised. Decisions by supervisors are very well identified and included in the records. Separate records are kept of complaints and allegations. Personnel files are well ordered. The panel members' files are fully compliant and give a clear start date to ensure clarity about tenure. Staff files are well organised, but one lacked a current CRB for a sessional worker. The premises are excellent and appropriate for the work undertaken. The offices are easily identified and are accessible. A disaster recovery plan is in place and there is suitable insurance for the organisation. The back-up of files electronically is under consideration. There are sufficient financial funds to support the agency. There is regular reporting and scrutiny of finances to ensure financial viability, which is robust and works effectively. The wider Coram organisation is committed to supporting the work of the adoption agency and has done so when there have been difficulties. Adopters experience of Coram is of an organisation that values them and supports them in parenting their children. The management, finances and structure all have the clear aim of providing safe and secure families for children.

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, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
19	ensure that those employed have full and satisfactory information available in respect of each matter specified in Schedule 2 VAA Regs 2003 reg 14(3)(d)	5 January 2009

Recommendations

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

- take the application to be assessed as a prospective adopter before the preparation training, in line with the the Guidance on the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (National Minimum Standard 4)
- ensure that prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment which includes checks with their local authority of residence over the past 10 years (National Minimum Standard 4)
- ensure that the adoption and permanence panel consists of no more than 10 members (National Minimum Standard 11)

- ensure that panel minutes record the role of members, the reasons for recommendations, any conflict of interest and how it is resolved (National Minimum Standard 12)
- ensure that a system is in place to ask adoptive parents whether they are prepared to agree to notify the adoption agency if their adopted child dies during childhood or soon afterwards (National Minimum Standard 5)
- ensure the policies and procedures in relation to the operation of the adoption panel comprehensively address how conflicts of interest are dealt with and accurately reflect the requirements of the regulations in relation to membership (NMS 10)
- ensure the Children's Guide includes the information required by standard 1.4A (NMS 1)
- ensure the manager for the service has a qualification in management (National Minimum Standard 14).