

The London Borough of Croydon Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

Unique reference number	SC059610
Inspection date	30/09/2008
Inspector	Rosemary Dancer
Type of inspection	Random

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Date of last inspection	05/07/2007

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 adoption agency of the London Borough of Croydon undertakes all statutory work associated with adoption services. This includes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adoptive families, both domestic and overseas. Matching children with suitable families and providing support to the placement. Post adoption support including support for adopted adults, including birth records counselling and support for birth relatives.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced interim inspection that looked specifically at the progress made in meeting the actions and recommendations made at the last inspection.

There is evidence of improvement in most areas, although the Child Permanence Reports (CPR), information held on children's adoption files and adopter's case files are not yet of a consistent quality. The Statement of purpose, children's guide and the safeguarding procedure for children placed for adoption do not yet fully comply with regulations.

However, there is a new management team in place and a high level of commitment to improving services is expressed by the team. Although all three senior managers have only been appointed in the last 12 months considerable improvements have been achieved in this short timescale.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were seven actions from the last inspection. Five of these have been fully addressed, the two remaining actions relate to the information held on children's and adopters files and have been restated.

There were 24 recommendations from the last inspection. Of these 17 have been fully addressed, three have been partly addressed and four have not been addressed. The four remaining actions relate to consistency in the quality of the CPRs, the detail in the recording of the panel minutes, the detail of information in the staff recruitment procedures and the timeliness of the life story work for each child.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The approach to the recruitment of adopters who are likely to be able to meet the needs of the children requiring adoptive placements is now underpinned by a clear and detailed recruitment strategy.

The stage at which the agency accepts applications from prospective adopters is before any assessment work is carried out. This provides for adopters to have access to the formal routes of appealing an adverse decision about their suitability from the point of the assessment commencing.

The assessments of adopters viewed overall show an improved situation in respect to a more analytical approach being taken in assessment work and the detail relating to criminal records bureau (CRB) checks carried out on adopters are now being recorded. The quality assurance of reports is carried out in a more consistent way and practice in this area is now satisfactory. However, the home health and safety checklists do not include an assessment of risks to young children from hanging cords on window blinds and there remains a lack of consistency in respect to obtaining the full employment histories of adopters. In addition it is the policy in Croydon that where applicants have lived overseas police checks are not normally carried out.

The agency has developed clear written procedures for the use of the adoption register for adopters and children. Adopters, at a recent meeting with the agency, expressed a lack of clarity about the processes for referral so would benefit from being informed about these new procedures.

Some work has been carried out in respect setting up a tracking system to children through the system and a new set of permanency planning procedures is in draft form. The focus of these are on track the individual child and his progress through the permanency process. Delay in the processes is highlight ensuring that delays can be minimised. Good strides have also been made in the arrangements for matching. A matching procedure has been introduced which ensures that events like the placement planning meetings are being held in a timely way. Matching in Croydon takes place with due regard having been taken of the child's needs and the adopters capacity to meet those needs. The situation in respect to the permanence reports for children is that the quality remains variable. This could impact on the family finding and matching processes where, for example, a lack of up to date information means that adopters have not been provided with an up to date view of the child and his needs to base their decision on.

There are clear written policies and procedures governing the functioning of the panel and panels are being convened at a frequency which meets the business need. The panel minutes do not show the reasons for the panel recommendation, give any indication of the discussions of the panel, or show the role each attendee has on the panel. When the cases involving sibling groups are presented to panel individual minutes are now being made for each child. There is now an efficient decision making process in place, the decision maker has all information made available in a timely way, fully considers all information presented and makes the decision promptly.

The staff recruitment procedures do not include the detail of what constitutes good practice in staff recruitment, for example there is no mention of verifying the content of references with the referee. The files viewed for the agency members of staff had no evidence to show that references provided had been subject to verification. The agency has an effective system in place in respect to ensuring CRB checks are carried out on staff members before they commence work and there is a system in place to ensure that CRB checks are updated on a three yearly basis.

The safeguarding procedures do not explicitly address the safeguarding needs of children in an adoptive placement or receiving an adoption support service.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has a clear plan in place in respect to the development and monitoring of the support services and there are now clear referral systems in place. There is a varied range of support services up and running with firm plans in place for further developments.

There remain some difficulties in respect of ensuring the prompt completion of life story work, including the development of books and later life letters which are key in helping children to understand their situation.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has a clear plan in place in respect to the development and monitoring of the support services for birth parents. Some sensitive work was noted as having been carried out in respect to supporting birth parents. There are arrangements in place to for collecting birth parents views about the service they have received and using this information to inform future developments.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

There is a statement of purpose in place which contains some inaccuracies and does not include the arrangements for assessing support needs for people coming back to the service. The statement is not being updated and reviewed on at least an annual basis. There is a guide in place for younger children which explains the adoption process and is a useful tool for helping children to understand their situation. The guide does not contain the contact details for the Children's Rights Director for England and Wales. Applicants are provided with written information about the adoption processes but not all are told about the various routes for appeal when the agency makes an adverse decision about progressing their case once a formal application has been submitted.

There are two reports sent to the executive annually. These are written by the panel chair and do not include information about all of the work of the agency, such as the support services to adopters.

There is a new management team in place. As can be seen from the detail in this report considerable progress has been made in improving the services provided to people affected by adoption. Children are being placed at the centre of the process, a more strategic approach is being taken in the development of services to children and their families and a stable adoption staff team is in place. There remain some shortfalls in respect to the staffing of the district teams but management have demonstrated a commitment to building stable teams in the districts. There is an induction process in place which now has more relevance to the work of the adoption team and further developments in improving the induction process are planned.

Details of complaints made and the outcomes of these are now being kept by the manager for monitoring purposes. While adopters files are well-ordered not all key information is being routinely filed. Likewise for children's files the contents are not comprehensive in every case. A disaster recovery plan is now in place and the options for backing up paper files are being explored.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
1	develop the safeguarding procedures to include the safeguarding needs of children in adoptive placements and those who are receiving adoption support service and ensure that all staff are confident in the use of the procedures (The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2005, as amended Regulation 9)	29/11/2008
1	amend and develop the statement of purpose to include the arrangements for assessing adoption support needs for previously adopted children (The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2005, as amended Regulation 2)	29/11/2008
1	include in the children's guides the contact details for the Children's Rights Director for England and Wales (The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2005, as amended Regulation 3)	29/11/2008
25	arrange for all required information to be placed on adopter's case files. (The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2005, as amended Regulation 22)	29/11/2008
25	arrange for all required information to be placed on children's adoption files (The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2005, as amended Regulation 12)	29/11/2008

Recommendations

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

- obtain applicants' months of employment (MNS 4.6)
- ensure that any risks in prospective adopters' households in relation to the risks to children from hanging cords on window blinds are excluded (NMS 4.6)
- review the practice in relation to obtaining police checks from abroad where adopters have lived in another country (NMS 4.6)
- ensure the all of the assessment reports in respect to children are up to date and fit for purpose (NMS 5.2)
- ensure the panel minutes consistently record the detail of the panel discussions, are clear about the reasons for the recommendations made and show the role each member has on the panel (NMS 12.3)
- ensure the staff recruitment and selection procedures detail good practice in

safeguarding children (NMS 19.2)

- ensure that lifestory work is of a good quality and is carried out with children in a timely way (NMS 6.6)
- ensure all applicants are informed of their rights to appeal decisions made by the agency (NMS 3.1)
- ensure that the reports provided to the executive include details of the management and outcomes of all of the adoption agency work (NMS 17.3)
- develop a back-up system for paper files (NMS 29.5)