

Wednesday, 6 July 2022

CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS) INSPECTION FINDINGS

Purpose of report:

This report provides an update on the findings from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) that took place in January 2022. The feedback from Ofsted, including further detail not published in the final inspection report, is included here along with an outline of the next steps that Surrey's Children's Services are taking in response.

Introduction:

1. Children's services improvement is a high priority for the Council. Since the last full inspection of our services by Ofsted in 2018, we have been delivering an ambitious and innovative improvement plan which has driven by a focus on improving outcomes for children and families and goes well beyond resolving only the issues highlighted by Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) and the Commissioner.
2. The routine national inspection activity resumed in May 2021 following a pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Ofsted carried out a full ILACS inspection (also known as a 'Standard Inspection') of Surrey's children's services in January 2022. The [final report of Ofsted's findings](#) was published on their website on 9 March 2022.
3. This report sets out the scope and timescales of the inspection, the findings and feedback provided, and the next steps for the services to ensure we continue to build on the work so far and fulfil our ambition of delivering consistently good and outstanding services for children and young people in Surrey.

Ofsted ILACS Inspection: Scope, Timescales & Processes

4. The ILACS inspection took place in accordance with the [ILACS Framework](#). It is principally focused on the effectiveness of Surrey's services to help & protect children, the effectiveness of the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live (incl. those who return home), the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, adoption and progress of care

leavers. The inspectors also evaluate the effectiveness of leaders and managers; the impact they have on the lives of children and young people; and on the quality of professional practice.

5. On Monday 10 January 2022, the Executive Director of Children, Families and Lifelong Learning received notification from Ofsted that the inspection would be starting. This initial notification starts an inspection process lasting approximately 3 weeks with a period of off-site/remote work for the inspectors followed by a period of on-site work. The complete timetable is set out below:

Week 1 – Notice Period (Off-Site)	
Monday 10 January	Receive phone call notification of inspection
	Afternoon call with Rachael Wardell & Lead Inspector
Tuesday 11 January	Share child-level data and audits
Wednesday 12 January	Share performance & Management Information
Thursday 13 & Friday 14 January	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence Telephone conference team meeting (including an Ofsted analytical officer)

During Week 1, Inspectors also meet with senior leaders and partners (e.g. Leader, Lead Member, DCS, Directors, SSCP Chair, Judge, CAFCASS.etc).

Week 2 Fieldwork	
Monday 17 January	Lead inspector on site in afternoon to meet Rachael & set up the inspection
	Full inspection team on site gathering evidence
Tuesday 18 January	Full inspection team on site gathering evidence
Wednesday 19 January	Full inspection team on site gathering evidence
Thursday 20 January	Full inspection team on site gathering evidence
Friday 21 January	Full inspection team off-site evaluation of evidence

Week 3 Fieldwork	
Monday 24 January	Full inspection team on site from lunchtime gathering evidence
Tuesday 25 January	Full inspection team on site gathering evidence
Wednesday 26 January	Full inspection team on site gathering evidence
Thursday 27 January	Full inspection team on site gathering evidence
Friday 28 January	Feeding back inspection findings Team offsite by early afternoon

6. There were five Social Care Inspectors (one of those being the Lead Inspector), an additional Social Care Regulatory Inspector (SCRI) and one Education Inspector. While the Social Care Inspectors are evaluating all aspects of children’s services as set out in the framework, the SCRI focuses on the recruitment, assessment & training for foster & adoptive carers. The Education Inspector focuses on:
- the educational progress of children in care
 - children missing education
 - electively home-schooled children
 - how the local authority has promoted school attendance
 - partnership working between schools and the local authority
 - the experiences of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET)
7. At the end of the inspection, Ofsted make their graded judgements on a 4-point scale: outstanding, good, requires improvement to be good, inadequate. A separate judgement (using the 4-point scale) is made on the following four areas:
- Experiences & progress of children and young people in need of help & protection.
 - Experiences & progress of children and young people in care & care leavers.
 - Impact of Leaders on social work practice
 - **Overall Effectiveness** – This grading is derived from the above three areas. They use both evidence and professional judgement to determine the grade.

Ofsted ILACS Inspection: Final Judgement and Findings
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8. A huge amount of activity takes place both before and during an Ofsted inspection. Throughout the 1 week off-site and the 2 weeks on-site, Ofsted met with hundreds of people – both virtually and in-person, evaluated hundreds of documents and reviewed hundreds of children’s records. A brief summary in numbers of the activity that took place during the inspection is included here:

21 Focus Group meetings	2 visits to front-facing services	214 documents / evidence provided
8 meetings with Partners	11 calls / meetings with young people	24 KLOEs & Requests for Further Info
9 meetings with senior leaders	16 phone calls to parents / carers	10 children and young people’s cases referred for follow-up
69 one-to-one meetings with practitioners	226 children’s records accessed & reviewed	0 case escalations for serious safeguarding concerns

9. The final report was published on 9 March 2022 with a judgement in all four areas of 'requires improvement to be good'. Ofsted recognised our efforts over the last few years and saw this evidenced in the quality of practice that they observed during the inspection. The higher grading means that we are no longer in intervention (for the first time in 7 years) and are now on the right path to delivering excellent services for children and families in Surrey.
10. Ofsted made 6 recommendations of areas we should focus on improving (far less than the 18 recommendations received in 2018); we have shared an improvement plan with Ofsted to address these 6 areas of practice in late-June. The recommendations are to improve:
 - The quality and effectiveness of assessments and plans for all children, including disabled children, homeless 16- and 17-year-olds and privately fostered children.
 - Partnership work to secure support for children and young people's mental health and well-being.
 - The provision of essential information to carers about children, and viability assessments to inform placements with friends or family.
 - The sufficiency of suitable accommodation for young people, including care leavers.
 - The quality and impact of supervision to ensure that decisions are timely and support the progression of children's plans.
 - The proportion of permanent staff, to reduce turnover.
11. A copy of the Ofsted Improvement Plan has been included with this report (see: *'Annex A – Ofsted Improvement Plan 22-6-2022'*).
12. While these have been highlighted as areas to focus on, we know there is more to do in other parts of children's services before we are delivering excellent services for all those we support. Further feedback from the inspectors highlighted a number of other areas that require further improvement. The following were highlighted when evaluating the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection:
 - Some children's needs are not well articulated during assessments, and sometimes these assessments are overly focused on the adults.
 - For children with disabilities, some plans focus primarily on the child's disability, resulting in a less robust response to wider needs.
 - Critical evaluation of information at child protection conferences needs to be better developed and actions should have a clear purpose, with timescales.
 - Our interventions for children living in neglectful situations needs to be more effective – and consistent. The Graded Care Profile 2 tool (introduced last year) is highly effective but this practice is not yet well embedded.

- Children aged 16 and 17 that are homeless should receive a more consistent response and receive a social work assessment sooner where appropriate.
 - Our identification of children living in private fostering arrangements needs to improve as does our evaluation of these assessments.
13. There are further areas of improvement based on the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers:
- When visiting children in care, we need to consistently record those visits to a high standard. Good quality recording emanates warmth and interest in children's circumstances but others are more impersonal.
 - Despite effective work to improve personal education plans, they are not yet of a consistently good quality, although overall the virtual schools are having a positive impact on the educational progress of children in care.
 - We need to reduce delays in identifying suitable placements for some children. There are a small number of older children with complex needs who experience early placement disruptions before a suitable residential care placement is found.
 - Despite more recent improvements in the recruitment of foster carers, there is still a significant shortage of local placements. We need to build on the success of the Mockingbird model to improve recruitment and retention.
 - Some care leavers do not receive prompt emotional and mental health support when they need it.
14. Although there are clearly further improvements to be made – a position supported by our own self-evaluation of our services – it was encouraging to see the progress recognised and a significant number of strengths highlighted by Ofsted as well. Here are some of the highlights from evaluating the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection:
- Well understood thresholds and effective early help services.
 - Effective multi-agency working for children at risk of significant harm
 - Highly effective Family Safeguarding Model addressing & reducing long-standing risks & needs.
 - Thorough – and in some cases excellent Assessments of need.
 - Strengthened approach to pre-court proceedings work with many children diverted from care.
 - Strong multi-agency work and interventions for children missing or at risk of exploitation.
15. The strengths highlighted when evaluating the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers include:
- Early permanence for children in care & effective planning to return home when safe to do so.

- Children living in connected carer arrangements are settled & well supported.
 - Children in care are seen regularly by child-focused social workers.
 - Well managed Children in Care Council that young people clearly value and whose wishes and priorities lead to tangible changes.
 - Good identification of children's health needs, including for children with disabilities and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people.
 - Recent successes in recruiting foster carers and an effective Mockingbird model for those carers that are part of it.
 - Committed personal advisers supporting our care leavers.
 - Thoughtful, sensitive and person-centred direct work with UASC care leavers.
 - Health needs of care leavers are well understood, and personal advisers work well with care leavers and health professionals to ensure that specific health needs are addressed.
16. Further areas of strong practice were highlighted through the evaluation of the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families:
- The senior leadership team and council leaders, including the director of children's services (DCS), the leader of the council and the chief executive, have achieved a significant change in the culture of leadership through strong and credible commitment and drive to improve services for vulnerable children and families in Surrey.
 - Leaders at all levels actively provide effective scrutiny and challenge and have a comprehensive range of performance reports. They know the service well & have a good understanding of its effectiveness and what still needs to improve.
 - Effective partnerships enable the progression of joint initiatives and joint approaches to improve practice.
 - A comprehensive sufficiency strategy is being implemented with an increased range of suitable accommodation options.
 - Social workers report that they have felt well supported during the pandemic, both emotionally and professionally.

Ofsted ILACS Inspection: Next Steps
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17. For the 6 recommended areas for improvement highlighted by Ofsted (see paragraph 10), an improvement plan has been developed and shared with Ofsted in late-June 2022. In some cases we already have established improvement programmes in place such as the Recruitment, Retention & Culture programme and the Placement, Values & Outcomes programme which are focused on tackling these issues and will continue to do so.

18. We have refreshed our approach to our children's services improvement programme – now known by a title which represents our ambition – 'Achieving Excellence'. The Achieving Excellence Board will be meeting every 6 weeks and will be focused on achieving the changes needed across our services, not just for the 6 recommended areas. Task and finish groups are being established where needed and we have further committed additional resources to support this until at least March 2023.
- a) This improvement programme builds on the successes of the Getting to Good transformation programme which was delivering changes across children's services from Autumn-2021 to January 2022. We are in a new phase of improvement following the acknowledgement of the changes made so far but there is still a lot to do.
 - b) The scope of the Achieving Excellence programme is very broad with support being provided across C-SPA, Early Help, Assessment, Family Safeguarding, Children with Disabilities, Looked After Children, Care Leavers and Fostering services.
 - c) Current priorities for the programme include:
 - Embedding the Family Safeguarding Model and delivering 'phase 2'.
 - Improving recruitment and retention of staff across the workforce and reducing reliance on agency workers.
 - CWD safeguarding practice and partnership working across children's services.
 - Placement planning for children in care, referral pathways for placements and ensuring carers and children receive the right information at the right time.
 - Developing our local offer for care leavers and keeping information accurate and up-to-date for young people and the Care Leavers service.
 - Piloting new ways of working at the front door (C-SPA) following recommendations from the task & finish group.
 - Improving processes across the Fostering service and developing more effective recording and reporting solutions.
 - Ensuring learning from monthly QA Practice Learning Reviews inform our priorities going forward and that improvement resources are adjusted accordingly.
19. We gained a significant amount of feedback and insight into the quality of practice during the ILACS inspection (far more than ever appears in the final report) and can provide assurance that all feedback will be addressed over the coming months – including building on the range of strengths highlighted by Ofsted.

20. Our ambition for our services is high, we know what good quality services look like and we will be maintaining a relentless focus on achieving excellence because our residents deserve nothing less. Our ambitions are reflected in our refreshed directorate purpose: 'We root children and families in our hearts and minds because it is our purpose to ensure that every child is seen and heard, feels safe and can grow'.
21. The following video [Rooting children and families in our hearts and minds - YouTube](#) best reflects our ambitions for Surrey's children's services.

Conclusions:

22. Surrey's children's services have been in intervention, with an overall Ofsted judgement of 'inadequate' since 2015. The recent ILACS inspection marks a significant milestone on our improvement journey and the changes made have been recognised by Ofsted with an improved judgement of 'requires improvement to be good'.
23. We know there is more to do. Our own self-evaluation shows this and matches the findings from Ofsted so we have renewed our commitment to achieving excellence for children's services and delivering consistently good and outstanding practice for children, young people and families.
24. While a significant amount of improvement work is already underway, the Achieving Excellence programme is developing focused improvement plans to address those areas we know need further work and to strengthen the areas of good practice across our services.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Select Committee:

25. Reviews the findings from the January 2022 Ofsted ILACS inspection and the progress made since 2018 to achieve the improved judgement and the move out of intervention with Ofsted.
26. Agrees to receive a further update on the progress made delivering the children's services 'Achieving Excellence' programme in Autumn 2022.

Next steps:

- An improvement plan to address the 6 recommended areas for improvement (highlighted in the inspection report) has been shared with Ofsted in late-June 2022.

- Oversight and scrutiny of the improvements to children’s services will continue to take place at the Achieving Excellence Board, Surrey Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (Executive group) – where appropriate, the Surrey Corporate Parenting Board and the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee.
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Sources/background papers

- Ofsted Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services Guidance published on GOV.UK - [Inspecting local authority children’s services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services)
- Ofsted January 2022 inspection report - published 9 March 2022 on Ofsted’s website: [Ofsted | Surrey County Council](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/2022/03/09/inspection-report-january-2022)

Annex Documents

- Annex A – Ofsted Improvement Plan 22-6-2022

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