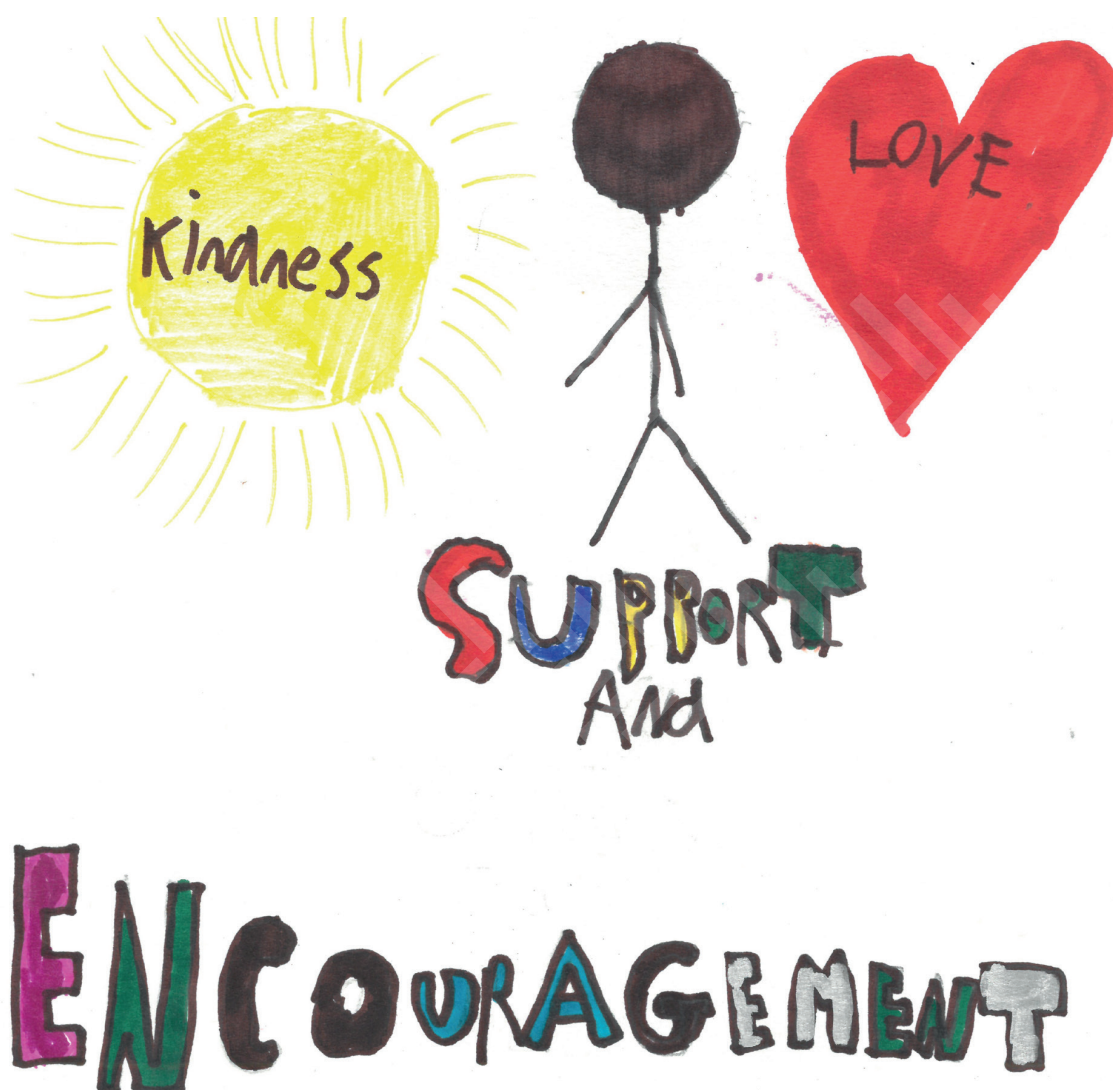


Report of a joint inspection of services for children and young people subject to compulsory supervision orders living at home with their parents in Na h-Eileanan an Iar - the Western Isles

Prepared by the Care Inspectorate in partnership with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

13 January 2026





Keeping The Promise at the heart of what we do

We would like to thank everyone who took part in our inspection.

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The cover for this report shows artwork by a young person from Na h-Eileanan an Iar. We would like to thank them for their contribution.

Inspection summary of children, young people and families

Who we are



We are a team of inspectors who spent time in the Western Isles from August–November 2025. It was our job to find out what was working well for children and their families.



We wanted to learn more about the support provided by local services to a specific group of children: children living with their parents who have been on **compulsory supervision orders***.

***Compulsory supervision orders** mean that the local authority has responsibility for looking after and helping the child or young person.

What we did during the inspection



Surveys for children, parents and staff



Met children, young people and families



Read children's records



Met staff and leaders



Read information about local services

What we learned about your area



Most children and young people had the help they needed.



Staff worked hard to make sure that children and young people felt they were seen, listened to and understood.



Children and young people were kept safe and helped to stay in secure and stable home environments.



Leaders needed to understand what they did well and what they had to do better and ask children and young people for their thoughts and ideas more.

Our approach

The joint inspection of services for children and young people subject to compulsory supervision orders living at home with their parents in the Western Isles took place between 11 August and 20 November 2025.

Joint inspection teams include inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland. Teams also include young inspection volunteers, who are young people with direct experience of care or child protection services. Young inspection volunteers receive training and support and contribute to joint inspections using their knowledge and experience to help us evaluate the quality and impact of partners' work. Teams also may include associate assessors who are professionals from other organisations who work as part of an inspection team for the duration of a particular inspection. More information about our approach to our joint inspections can be found [here](#).

Information about the range of evidence gathered during this inspection can be found in Appendix 1. We take a consistent approach to inspections by using the [quality framework](#) for children and young people in need of care and protection. Inspectors collect and review evidence against all 22 quality indicators in the framework to examine three key lines of inquiry which link with the promise foundations. In the final section of our report we evaluate four quality indicators using our [six-point scale](#). We also provide a confidence statement and outline next steps.

Throughout the report there are some terms which are in bold. This means that they are defined in the glossary which can be accessed [here](#). At the beginning of the glossary, we define what we mean by child, parent and carer and subject to a compulsory supervision order while living at home.

As the findings in this joint inspection are based on a sample of children and young people, we cannot assure the quality of service received by every single child and young person in the Western Isles who are on compulsory supervision orders living at home with their parents.

Context

Na h-Eileanan an Iar – The Western Isles is made up of Harris, Lewis, Barra, North and South Uist. The population of the islands is 26,200 and 3,200 of those are children and young people of school age. Alongside Highland, they have the lowest local authority population density in Scotland. While no areas in the Western Isles are in the 20% of most deprived data zones, this can be misleading as area-based measures are not ‘island proofed’ and can result in rural areas not being fully contextualised in **SIMD** indicators. The Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) noted that the area experiences the highest level of fuel poverty in the United Kingdom. This is due to low incomes, higher bills and poor energy efficiency. 850 children are subject to fuel poverty, 19.1% of the population of under 16s.

In mid-2024 Western Isles sat third in the lowest populated areas of Scotland, behind Shetland and Orkney, and it had one of the lowest percentages of children (aged 0 to 15 years) in Scotland. Western Isles was one of five local authority areas to see a decrease in population in 2023/4(1). The majority (62.5%) of children who were ‘**looked after**’ in the Western Isles at the end of July 2024, lived at home with their parents (2). On par with the Scottish average, 17.5% of looked after children in the Western Isles experienced more than one placement type during 2023/24(3).

There are significant challenges for those leading and working in services for children and young people subject to compulsory supervision orders living at home with their parents in the Western Isles. The geography of the Western Isles is complex and varied: travel from and between the islands is time consuming, expensive and reliant on the weather. Public transport is infrequent. Ongoing issues relating to the recruitment and retention of staff are significant and several key posts had been vacant prior to this inspection. The challenges of recruiting staff to islands, the adverse impact of weather and transport result in unique pressures. National policy and guidance were considered with an island focus. This is based on a community approach where staff live closely alongside those using services which can also be a challenge. Adaptability and flexibility are pre-requisites to living and working within this context.

Footnotes:

[1] Source: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/mid-2024-population-estimates/#>

[2] Source: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-child-protection-2023-24/document...> (3)]

Source: <https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/explore-the-data>

Key messages

Key Messages

1. Most children and young people were receiving support to reduce risks and to effectively address their needs.
2. Passionate and committed staff were ensuring that children and young people felt seen, listened to and understood.
3. The use of compulsory supervision orders was keeping children and young people safe and helping them stay in secure, stable home environments.
4. The quality of children and young people's plans were evaluated as adequate or below in the majority of records we read.
5. The strategic direction for corporate parenting was lacking purposeful collective drive and did not benefit from timely monitoring of actions and progress.
6. Self-evaluation, quality assurance and multi-agency training were under-developed. This meant opportunities for practice improvement and staff development were limited.

Inspection findings

Key Line of enquiry 1

Children and young people are well supported to live with their families. This support helps to keep them safe, overcome difficulties and makes a positive difference in their lives.

Building trusting relationships

The majority of children and young people were benefiting from services which were keeping them safe and helping to improve their lives. Over time staff built trusting relationships with children and families. Overall, they felt seen, understood and listened to. Children, young people and families were treated with respect and their views had been included in aspects of their support and care. Across the partnership, this was an area of strength.

Staff were passionate and committed to the wellbeing of children and young people. They were working creatively to problem solve and provide the right support despite challenges presented by resources and connectivity on the islands. Staff had a flexible family-centred approach and regularly contacted each other for guidance and support and to share information. This had led to children and young people accessing a wider range of services that impacted positively on their lives.

A culture based on trust and relationships was evident in how staff worked together. They relied upon each other to overcome challenges. We heard from staff who were managing challenging situations and had benefited from the support their peers provided on a day-to-day basis. The effective and strong working relationships between staff across all agencies had improved the support available to children and young people.

The right help at the right time

All children and young people had an assessment, the majority of which were good or very good. The majority of records included a health assessment. Multi-agency contributions to assessments helped to promote an integrated understanding of risk and need. Appropriate onward referrals meant that the needs and risks which had been identified in the assessment were effectively met. Children and young people were generally given the information they needed when they were made subject to a **compulsory supervision order** (CSO). Social work records contained details of conversations with children and young people which explained their rights and the processes they were involved in but these were not as explicit in children's plans or reviews.

Team around the child meetings provided an effective framework for staff to identify and assess risk and need. The third sector bolstered statutory services, and they

identified the need for earlier intervention in key areas. This ensured that more children, young people and families got the help they needed when they needed it.

Support to stay safe and support positive outcomes

The majority of children and young people were getting help to stay in secure, stable home environments and were receiving support for any identified risks and needs. Children and young people were helped to increase their school attendance and to maintain contact with their families if they needed to move temporarily. Services were responsive when specific needs arose and provided 'wrap around' care. An example of this was the partnership's response to a spike in anti-social behaviour. The police, social workers and Action for Children worked together to provide positive activities to increase the young people's involvement in sport and workforce training. This impacted positively on young people's school attendance, self-esteem and sense of achievement.

A few services were key to providing additional, targeted support. The Council had invested promise funding in Room 19 at Àrd-sgoil MhicNeacail/The Nicolson Institute, the large secondary school and community hub in Stornoway. Along with the services provided by MCR Pathways and The Shed this ensured that care experienced young people felt increasingly supported and encouraged to achieve their potential and to increase re-engagement in education. Room 19 provided a space for learners who were at Àrd-sgoil MhicNeacail/The Nicolson Institute, to get some one-to-one space and support. MCR pathways provided mentoring support and the Shed, emotional and mental health support. All these services met at the school and operated a drop-in. These interventions had effectively resulted in increased attendance and, for some young people, a reduction in incidences of young people in conflict with the law. There was an authority wide focus on improving school attendance and the local council had demonstrated their commitment to this by continuing investment in Room 19 once the promise funding had finished.

During national Care Experienced week, we visited an art project run by enthusiastic and encouraging staff during a lunchtime drop-in at Àrd-sgoil MhicNeacail /The Nicolson Institute and Sgoil an Tairbeirt/Sir E Scott School. The activity focussed on the **UNCRC** in an innovative and inclusive way by teaching children about rights. This raised their awareness about care experience alongside focussing on their right to an education and expressing all these ideas and feelings in artwork.

The successful coordination of services by partner agencies, including the third sector, allowed young people to have continued support at school and in the community. Action for Children provided a valued range of services which were supporting children, young people and parents alike. Services were targeted and responsive to the needs in the community, actively involving families in having a say in their development. Commissioned services added capacity for young people to access the right support where and when they needed it. This provided care experienced children and young people with safe spaces and positive, fun activities. Where partners were both supporting mental health and well-being, for example, they made sure to share information and/or target different cohorts of young people.

This helped to ensure that services were available to a broader range of young people. Staff working in schools also delivered services in the community and this meant that young people could maintain their relationships and experience continuity. Some families benefited from ongoing work with Action for Children for many years over which time staff had developed enduring relationships with family members.

Parents mostly understood why services were involved with them and their children and were experiencing positive relationships with staff, particularly the support they got from Action for Children and social work in general.

Whilst frontline staff knew children, young people and their families very well, a lack of multi-agency quality assurance meant that any understanding of the impact of their work was not based on evaluative feedback. In a few cases, staff shortages impacted the support that could be offered to children and young people. For example, for a few, frequent staff changes inhibited the important building of relationships. There were challenges in ensuring that all children and young people had access to the right services at the right time, given the geography, weather and transport issues of the island context. A range of services were concentrated around Stornoway. It was not always possible for children and young people living elsewhere to easily access these or similar services. Nonetheless, those small numbers of children and families we met who were living in other parts of the islands were supported well by the services they received.

Effective use of compulsory supervision orders

Compulsory supervision orders were being used effectively to keep children safe and to ensure that help was provided when it was needed and, in some cases, for longer than the order required. The grounds of referral varied with the highest percentage being for a lack of parental care. Most children who had to make a temporary move during the time on the CSO, were effectively supported to maintain relationships with their parent or carer and other family members. The majority of children had been the subject of an **Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD)** during the time of the compulsory supervision order with less than half having a period on the **child protection register**. Links with the **child protection committee** were being forged to ensure fuller inclusion of the needs of children and young people who were in care. The **Bairns Hoose** was a promising development.

One of the constraints that staff worked together to overcome, was the frequency with which a Sheriff was able to sit in the local court due to location. The Sheriff sat in Stornoway fortnightly which increased the frequency with which social workers needed to provide up to date reports for children and young people on interim compulsory supervision orders. Legal oversight was ensured. Reporters to children's hearings and social workers collaborated to manage the frequency of reporting to courts taking a pragmatic and proportionate approach which reduced the frequency families had to participate in updating assessments. Feedback from some families praised the way they were included in children's hearings and it is of note that the Western Isles was the first area in Scotland to resume face to face hearings when Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

Key Line of enquiry 2

The services children and young people receive are well planned and delivered in a way which is compassionate and by staff who put children and young people at the heart of decision-making. People in the workforce ensure that children, young people and parents are meaningfully listened to, heard and included.

Including the views of children and young people in key processes

Trauma informed staff recognised the need to work with children and young people at a pace that suited them. The strong relationships that children and young people had with a key member of staff, helped them to participate in key processes. Some parents found building trusting relationships difficult when staff changed. However, most had positive relationships with at least one member of staff and most were confident that staff listened to them and took their views seriously.

The views of children, young people, parents and carers were taken into account in assessments, and reviews. Their contributions and decisions were respected.

Independent Advocacy was helping children, young people and their parents get their views across, to understand key processes and to prepare for meetings. Frontline staff were aware that advocacy services had a wide reach in the Western Isles and saw their role as critical in helping children, young people, parents and carers to contribute. **SCRA** also offered information on advocacy services at different points of the hearing process and this was available when it was needed.

Reviewing plans

The partnership had good completion rates for producing plans and did so within recommended timescales. Staff feedback from the survey showed us that the majority of staff felt confident to prepare an outcome focussed plan and felt that everyone who needed to had contributed. However, we assessed the quality of the majority of plans as adequate or weak and only some good or very good. Staff were slightly more optimistic about their ability and confidence in writing plans than record reading showed; plans were not routinely quality assured and this was a missed opportunity to improve quality.

We evaluated that the majority of review meetings had been chaired effectively and all had a record which showed progress and challenge, with contributions from children, young people and parents. There were practical challenges to recruiting and maintaining a reviewing officer role in the Western Isles that was independent of case management. While extra capacity was being sought, this meant that all

reviews were chaired on-line with options for hybrid attendance. While this had not impacted on the evaluation of the effectiveness of reviews, it could risk diminishing the child or young person's choice about how their reviews were conducted and how comfortable they felt giving their views.

Support for children, young people and families to be involved in wider service development.

MCR Pathways, Room 19 and The Shed had used feedback to develop services. The Turadh Parenting Support Group, run by Action for Children, had involved parents as equal partners in deciding what programme to use to support parents with substance use challenges. Action for Children was using a range of methods to capture feedback from children, young people, parents and carers. This included online and paper feedback and captured conversations used to inform service improvement. That said, feedback from those who used services was not purposefully informing multi-agency quality assurance and self-evaluation.

The rights of children and young people were included in the **Children and Young People's Plan**. Children and young people had helped guide some limited aspects of service design and delivery and there were a few examples of projects to improve how the voices of children and young people were heard but it was too early to tell what their impact was. **Corporate parents** were not yet responding effectively to direct feedback from care experienced young people on what they could do better at a service-wide level. This remained a goal in the **Corporate Parenting Plan** but had not yet been progressed.

Support for staff

Staff were confident in their knowledge, skills and their ability to recognise, report and respond to signs of harm. They knew what standards were expected from them and the majority of staff felt listened to and respected within their services. Importantly, there was a sense that leaders understood the challenges in delivery of frontline services, and overall staff felt supported by their managers and leaders.

Most staff received some form of line management supervision which was supportive and challenged them to achieve a high standard of practice. Staff relied heavily on informal peer support and we heard about how valuable this was for colleagues. For some it was their only form of regular support.

A range of trauma-informed single agency learning and development opportunities were provided. Multi-agency learning opportunities were not regularly provided to further develop the workforce and help them to undertake their roles. Any multi-agency opportunities available were under the umbrella of the child protection committee. While this was valuable, learning and development opportunities with a specific corporate parenting focus and related topics had not been regularly available. This meant that staff were not receiving the support provided by training to help enhance their role.

Quality Assurance

Multi-agency quality assurance arrangements had not been implemented. Audits of records were not regularly taking place to help partners identify examples of best practice, areas for improvement and potential risks.

The lack of quality assurance work also made it harder for staff to understand the impact of their work. In the staff survey only 12% of staff agreed that evaluation of the impact of services had led to improvement and the majority of staff said they didn't know. While staff could reflect on the progress in the lives of children, young people and families, they lacked the assurance that evaluative information could have given them.

Key Line of enquiry 3

Leaders and managers work well together to create and maintain a joined-up system of care which delivers the right services to each child at the right time. This provides children and young people, their parents and the workforce with help, support and accountability.

Corporate parenting partners' vision and direction.

The vision, values, and aims of the leadership team were well understood by the majority of staff across all partner agencies. The vision for the children and young people of the Western Isles was contained within the children and young people's strategic plan based on the promise.

Corporate Parenting arrangements had been incorporated into the children and young people's plan **Promise Plan 2023-25**. While the corporate parenting action plan was comprehensive and rights based, it had not been reviewed. It was therefore difficult to ascertain progress or have full confidence of its governance. The majority of actions were for children's social work who would have benefited from a review of partners' support.

A corporate parenting subgroup had been tasked with overseeing the actions in the plan. It had been over a year since this group last met. Full membership of the group, when it had met, had lacked consistent input, particularly from health. We could not be confident about the progress of this plan and the priority the partnership was giving to corporate parenting governance. While some actions had progressed, for example, school attendance for care experienced children and young people, the overarching plan was lacking in traction and therefore its capacity to influence and direct practice and development was reduced.

The partnership acknowledged a dip in momentum since the pandemic and some of the changes that were required then had settled into a 'norm'. There was a pressing need, which the partnership acknowledged, to re-establish strategic oversight arrangements of the corporate parenting duties and how they were developed in partnership with children and young people.

Collaborative leadership

The geographical context posed distinct challenges to effective collaborative leadership. Not all the leaders from the partnership were based in the Western Isles on a full time basis. Some leaders were required to cover a large geographical area reducing the time they could be in the Western Isles. This, and the on-island location of other leaders, limited their opportunities to come together face to face to plan and direct services. It also impacted staff's opportunity to have access to leaders when they needed it. While the majority of staff overall felt that leaders were visible, communicated regularly with them at all levels and understood the quality of their work, this was lower for police and health staff.

Relationships between senior leaders were generally strong but lacked explicit shared ownership of strategic drive. Collaborative working between statutory and third sector partners, while a strength, was not always clearly reflected due to the recent dip in monitoring of strategic priorities relating to corporate parenting.

The partnership was not maximising the opportunity to use feedback from children and young people to inform service development. Children and young people had helped guide some limited aspects of service design and delivery and there were a few examples of projects to improve how their voices were heard. Collaborative working with children and young people would present opportunities for creative dialogue and planning.

Resourcing and delivery

Leaders were experiencing significant budgetary constraints which offered little flexibility or opportunities for contingency planning. Alongside difficulties in recruitment of staff, this presented challenges. Less than half of staff believed that leaders ensured the necessary capacity and this created pressure for staff at all levels, including leadership.

Operational managers were often the only feasible contingency to cover gaps in frontline roles. While this consolidated their knowledge of children and young people and supported the needs of staff, it lessened the delineation between strategic and operational focus. Senior leaders were not always able to identify clear boundaries to empower middle managers and provide them with the necessary training and development.

When we met staff, there was an acknowledgement of the inherent difficulties in resourcing which was resolved often by goodwill and commitment. Some staff felt more supported by their leaders than others and police and health staff were less positive in this regard.

Governance oversight

The partnership was not evaluating performance against shared objectives. While leaders may have had informal oversight of arrangements based on knowledge of staff and families, the absence of a structured self-evaluation programme was limiting the ability to collectively and consistently assess and strengthen practice.

Self-evaluation and quality assurance activity were not routinely taking place at a multi-agency level. While minimal audit activity focusing on child protection had taken place this was of limited value in helping the partnership know how well their services were performing for children on compulsory supervision orders living at home. By not routinely using data from SCRA, independent reviewing officers and feedback from children and young people, the partnership was missing an opportunity to understand the impact of services on the lives of children and young people. This also presented a risk in identifying what services were effective, where improvement was needed and how resources could be deployed.

Confidence statement and next steps

Confidence statement

There are strengths in the delivery of services in the Western Isles. The enabling culture staff demonstrate in working with children and young people has made a positive impact on their lives. The areas of improvement are in relation to the governance of corporate parenting and developing self-evaluation and quality assurance for improvement.

Some of the contextual obstacles that the partnership faces are more challenging to overcome than others. There is a necessity to recalibrate how time is used for development and how this would positively impact on the delivery of corporate parenting. This will mean partners reviewing how they fulfil governance responsibilities.

While leaders recognise the areas they need to focus on, and are committed to doing so, capacity and context has made it difficult to make this a priority. For this reason, the partnership would benefit from additional guided support to help focus attention on what needs to be done and how. This will enhance our confidence in the partnerships' ability to deliver an improvement plan and provide them with some valuable opportunities to work effectively together.

Next steps

The Care Inspectorate will request a joint action plan that details clearly how the partnership will make improvements in the key areas identified by inspectors. We will offer support for improvement by facilitating joint improvement focussed work with scrutiny partners. Progress will be monitored and supported through the Care Inspectorate's link inspector arrangements.

Evaluations

We collected and reviewed evidence against all quality indicators in the framework to support the three key lines of enquiry. We use a [six-point scale](#) to provide formal evaluation of four quality indicators. A summary of these is provided below, along with a brief rationale.

Quality Indicator 2.1: Impact on children and young people

We evaluate this quality indicator as GOOD

- Passionate and committed staff were ensuring that children and young people felt seen, understood and listened to.
- Most children and young people were experiencing meaningful and supportive relationships with key staff whom they trusted.
- Collaboration between staff across all agencies had improved the life chances of children and young people.
- As a result of close working relationships, children and young people were accessing a range of services that met their needs. This support was available in school and in the community.
- There were challenges in ensuring that all children and young people had access to the right services at the right time, given the geography, weather and transport issues of the island context.
- Without self-evaluation activity taking place, staff were not able to measure the impact of their work directly.

Quality Indicator 5.3: Care planning, managing risk and effective intervention

We evaluate this quality indicator as ADEQUATE

- Almost all children and young people had a plan which reflected the needs and risks identified in their assessment.
- Plans were reviewed on time and services supporting the child were included in meetings.
- The quality of the initial and follow up plans were adequate or weak in the majority of records we read.
- The absence of regular quality assurance and multi-agency training limited opportunities to improve practice.

Quality indicator 5.4: Involving individual children, young people and families

We evaluate this quality indicator as GOOD

- The views of individual children, young people and families were taken into account effectively in decisions relating to their own lives.
- The views of children, young people and parents were included in reviews.
- Children, young people, parents and carers had opportunities to develop relationships with a key member of staff, and they were supported to participate in key processes, although not all did.
- Children, young people and parent's views were not being used routinely to inform service delivery.

QI 9.2: The leadership for strategy and direction

We evaluate this quality indicator as ADEQUATE

- Leaders supported a culture that enabled frontline staff to successfully work collaboratively across services sharing their knowledge and skills.
- The strategic direction for corporate parenting lacked purposeful collective drive and did not benefit from collaborative implementation, monitoring of actions and progress.
- Leaders of corporate parenting had not developed self-evaluation, quality assurance and multi-agency training which was noted by staff at all levels. This limited opportunities for informed improvement.

Appendix 1: Summary of inspection activities

During the joint inspection we gathered evidence from a wide range of sources. This included:

Surveys

- We received 48 surveys from frontline staff and first line managers.
- We received three surveys from Western Isles children and young people.
- We received six surveys from Western Isles parents.

Meetings with children, young people and families

- We met with 50 children and young people (these included drop-in sessions where children attended).
- We met with 10 parents or other family members.

Review of children's records

- We reviewed the multi-agency records of 30 children and young people who had been subject to compulsory supervision orders while living at home with their parents over the past two years.

Meetings with staff and leaders

- We met with 132 staff (staff will have attended more than one focus group, this number is representative of staff we spoke to across all sessions therefore individual staff may have been counted more than once).
- We carried out three structured discussions with senior representatives from the partnership.

Review of written information

- We reviewed written information compiled by the partnership.

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