

How well do we protect children and meet their needs?

**Findings of the second national
programme of joint inspections of services
to protect children in Scotland 2009-12**

Summary report



Summary



In March 2012, the Care Inspectorate completed the second national programme of joint inspections of child protection services¹. Over the previous three years, teams of inspectors visited every council area in the country to evaluate how well services were working together to protect and meet the needs of children and young people up to the age of 18 years. We also assessed how well services in each area had improved since the first child protection inspection three years before.

The inspectors had experience of working across the range of services involved in protecting children. We looked at services provided by health, the police, the council and the Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration (SCRA). We also looked at how voluntary and independent organisations were contributing to keeping children safe and improving their lives. In total, we published reports across 32 local authority areas describing how good services in each area are at protecting children. To do this, we read a sample of children's files which were held by these services. We talked to children and their parents and carers about the help they got and the difference services were making to their lives. We met staff in these services who worked with children, parents, carers and other adults. We also spoke to senior managers with responsibility for planning and delivering services and supporting staff.

This report provides a brief summary of what we found across the whole inspection programme. It describes, in general terms, what we found to be working well, what is improving and what still needs to change to protect the most vulnerable children in Scotland. We cannot promise that this will be the same for every child who might need help in any area. To read the full account of our findings, visit <http://cinsp.in/11aLkMV> or to learn more about what we found in any of the 32 council areas, visit <http://cinsp.in/11R4kP7>

¹ Responsibility for leading the joint inspection programme was passed to the Care Inspectorate from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) on 1 April 2011.



WHAT IS WORKING WELL?

Leaders and senior managers in councils and partner services understand and take seriously their responsibilities for child protection. They ensure staff give high priority to keeping children safe.

Training and support is helping police, housing staff, teachers and early years workers and health staff to recognise when children need help and report any concerns quickly. Many staff who work with adults such as criminal justice social workers and addictions staff are also more alert to risks to children.

In almost all council areas there is better co-operation between police, health and social work services to investigate child protection concerns. More children now get an appropriate medical examination when needed.

In most areas, staff see children on the child protection register regularly. They communicate well with families and work hard to establish trust and win their confidence in order to help them.

Staff are working together more effectively in small multi-agency core groups to monitor the circumstances of children at risk, share information and support families. Parents and carers usually attend core groups which helps them be more involved in plans to keep their children safe.

Staff across services are good at sharing information about sex offenders who may pose a risk to children.

Child protection committees are doing well at supporting services in working together to keep children safe. Most have made positive progress in improving services in their areas.

WHAT IS IMPROVING?

Support to ensure babies are safe and well cared for after birth is being provided more quickly, more often. Staff are getting better at sharing information about pregnant women and their partners early when they think the baby could be at risk.

Staff and managers have been working hard to improve how well they assess risks and needs. Overall, they are assessing immediate risks better and can take more effective action to protect children as a result. They now need to focus on improving the quality of comprehensive assessments and assessing parenting capacity.

The quality of children's care plans is slowly improving as staff consider all areas of children's well-being, including their health and education. However, there is much more work still to do to ensure a helpful plan is in place for all children who need one and that it is regularly updated. In some areas, arrangements for chairing case conferences have been strengthened.

WHAT STILL NEEDS TO IMPROVE?

Vulnerable families in some areas of the country find it hard to get practical support to help prevent crisis. For many, getting planned help at evenings and weekends is particularly hard.

Children do not always have enough contact with social workers once their names are removed from the child protection register, even though they may still be vulnerable.

Staff need more training and support to keep children safe when parents are hostile and intimidating, dishonest about difficulties or unable to change. Children's social workers and addictions staff should work together more closely to keep children safe when parents are misusing drugs or alcohol.

Staff need more support to identify when children are being neglected and when alternative care is a better option.

A shortage of specialist services means that many children and young people are not getting enough help to recover from the effects of abuse and neglect and make up for what they have missed earlier in their lives. Accessing Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other specialist recovery services is still problematic in most areas of the country. Too often children and young people still wait for lengthy periods to get the help they need.

Services and child protection committees need to ask more searching questions about the difference they are actually making to children, and seek children's and families' views about the help they are getting.

Across the country, we need to understand and take more seriously the risks to children who run away from home or care placements.





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