

# Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Staffordshire County Council

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## About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of four Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. An additional HMI undertook a simultaneous inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment arrangements. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
  - discussions with children and young people receiving services, front-line managers, senior officers including the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives.
  - analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the children and young people's plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluation of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with 'Working Together To Safeguard Children', 2006.
  - a review of over 80 case records for children and young people with a range of needs to provide a view of services offered over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision-making undertaken.
  - the outcome of a simultaneous evaluation of the county's contact and referral centre (*First Response*) and four local teams providing assessment and planning services.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale:

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements
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## Service information

4. Staffordshire is the eighth largest county in England with a population of 825,800 people. Children and young people aged 0 to 18 years make up 22% of the population (173,081). Although the county is predominately rural, 75% of the population live in the main urban centres. The children's population is predominately White British (93.7%) but also includes children from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the largest of which are Pakistani based in Burton-Upon-Trent and Polish. Deprivation levels in the county are low overall but there are wards in Newcastle-Under-Lyme, East Staffordshire and Tamworth which fall into the most deprived areas in the country.

5. A number of strategic partnerships exist in Staffordshire including the Children's Trust and Trust Executive, the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB) and the Staffordshire Partnership Strategic Board. The Children's Trust includes representation from the county council, district councils, Connexions, South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT), North Staffordshire PCT, NHS North Staffordshire, Staffordshire Constabulary, the Learning Skills Council, the SSCB, Staffordshire Consortium of Infrastructure Organisations (voluntary sector), the Headteacher's Forum, children's commissioner, parent's commissioner and Association of Staffordshire Principals.

6. Children's social care services are delivered through '*First Response*', a county-wide emergency duty service, seven family assessment and support services and seven safeguarding teams based in Cannock, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Newcastle-Under-Lyme, Stafford, Staffordshire Moorlands and Tamworth. In addition, there is a safeguarding and assessment team in the South Staffordshire District, four children with disability teams, four through-care teams and four permanency teams. In May 2009, there were over 700 children in the care of the local authority with a projected increase to 750 by 2010. The number of children subject to child protection plans has increased recently and now stands at approximately 450. During the three years that the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has been in use in Staffordshire in excess of 1265 children and young people have been supported through this process. The local authority directly provides 323 foster care placements and commissions 166 placements through Independent Fostering Agencies. The local authority provides 16 respite care placements plus family link placements. One hundred and thirty children are in receipt of overnight respite care packages. In addition, respite care is provided as part of support packages within residential schools. There are two Youth Offending Institutions (YOI's) at Brinsford and Werrington.

7. Children's centres are being developed in several phases; six centres were established in phase 1 and situated in the most deprived parts of the county. Thirty-two centres were added in phase 2 and phase 3 centres are currently in the process of development.

8. Staffordshire has five nursery, 297 primary, 14 middle, 54 secondary and 23 special schools providing places to over 121,000 school age children and young people. There are also six pupil referral units providing 188 places. Staffordshire's strategy for extended schools and children's centres is based on a pyramid of schools working together. There are currently 50 community and learning partnerships across the county each with access to a Parent Support Worker.

9. Commissioning and planning of national health services and primary care are carried out by North and South Staffordshire PCTs. Acute hospital services are provided at Stafford general hospital and hospitals in Stoke-on-Trent, Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Burton-on-Trent. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are commissioned by the two PCT's and provided by Community Mental Health Trusts (South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare Foundation Trust) for the south of the county and Combined Healthcare for the north and Stoke-on-Trent.

## The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

### Overall effectiveness

### Grade 3 (Adequate)

10. The overall effectiveness of the safeguarding services in Staffordshire is adequate. The SSCB actively promotes awareness of safeguarding in the county and provides good leadership on safeguarding matters. The board is supported well through a range of sub-groups and professional advisers and has recently appointed an experienced and independent chairperson. Joint policies and procedures for the protection of children are comprehensive and up-to-date. The board's business plan covers all relevant aspects of safeguarding and child protection and is suitably resourced. There is wide access to high quality training for all staff and agencies, including the third sector. The findings from three serious case reviews have been fully disseminated and acted upon including within health services. Communication between the SSCB and the Children's Trust is effective. The impact of the CAF is good and this is reinforced by the Community and Learning Partnerships.

11. The safeguarding and child protection needs of children are responded to in a timely way although there is some inconsistency in the application of criteria to determine whether services should be provided or not. The development of the *First Response* service has been positive in ensuring greater consistency at the initial referral stage but this service has been under increased pressure recently. Challenges remain in respect of the levels and types of referrals and the roles played by all agencies and professionals at this key stage in agreeing appropriate thresholds. Assessments of children in need of protection generally show good

analysis of the risks involved but too often lack clarity about the desired outcomes of protection plans. Communication between professionals and teams is good and all child protection cases analysed were suitably allocated and reviewed. Managerial support for staff in terms of assessing risk is generally good but does not always provide a sufficiently strong challenge about the quality of child protection plans and the impact of services recommended. An adequate case auditing process is in place within the SSCB and in local teams but the information derived is not being used to best effect to measure the impact of services and the effectiveness of joint working. The SSCB is about to embark on an impact assessment.

## Capacity for improvement

## Grade 2 (Good)

12. Capacity for improvement is good. The political and managerial leadership across the council and a range of safeguarding partner agencies demonstrates good ambition and an impetus for change. Significant improvement has been made since the joint area review in 2005 when services were judged to be inadequate in terms of keeping children safe. The track record for improvement in safeguarding is now good. A well qualified, experienced and stable workforce shows strong commitment to safeguarding activity across the county leading to an increased range and balance of services. Political and senior management leadership has ensured that sufficient resources have been allocated to services and good progress has been made in the integration of services although it is clear this work is not yet complete. The quality of partnership working is adequate overall and structures and processes already in place indicate that further improvements are likely to take place. The views of service users are central to the planning process but there is only limited use of this evidence when services are evaluated. The management of assessment, allocation and monitoring of child protection cases has improved well since the joint area review. Managers have a range of appropriate strategic improvement plans to further assist safeguarding children. Performance targets are routinely set but, in some instances, are not sufficiently challenging and greater use could be made of them in terms of evaluating impact.

## Areas for improvement

13. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

### Within three months:

- Ensure there is joint agreement and commitment to *First Response* decision-making and the criteria used for determining initial action.
- Ensure *First Response* decisions following referral remain firm pending initial and core assessments.

- Ensure all assessments of children and families include clear evaluation of need and risks and lead to plans which state clearly the aims and objectives, timescales, user views, outcomes required and contingency arrangements.
- Ensure all plans following assessments are authorised by the responsible manager.

**Within six months:**

- Improve the effectiveness of auditing the impact of safeguarding provision by senior management to assure quality and promote stronger local performance management arrangements.

## **Outcomes for children and young people**

### **The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe** **Grade 3 (Adequate)**

14. The effectiveness of services in Staffordshire to ensure that children and young people are safe is adequate. Children in need of protection and safeguarding are identified well and awareness of safeguarding issues is good. In the main, there is effective co-operation between agencies to assess needs and risks leading to plans to ensure children and young people are suitably protected. However, there is the potential for duplication of effort between *First Response* and other teams and some inconsistencies in the expectation of referring agencies in respect of thresholds for action. Safeguarding in institutional settings including the YOIs, fostering and residential care and schools is given high priority and has been judged to be at least 'good' in most recent inspections. There are outstanding examples of safeguarding activity within Werrington and Brinsford YOI's including restraint management and arrangements for the transporting of young offenders. Considerable effort is made across the partnership to engage service users in safeguarding matters and to gather their views. Despite this strong commitment individual case records and strategic planning documents show that these views are not systematically used to assess needs and to determine whether users understand the plans, including strategic ones, formulated for them.

15. The SSCB provides clear leadership on safeguarding matters and is beginning to benefit from recent changes in chairing arrangements and membership. The full impact of these changes has yet to be felt and work on evaluating the effectiveness of provision is in the relatively early stages of development. Staff recruitment and vetting processes across all partner agencies accord with current guidance and regulation and are robust. Well focused attention is given to aspects of safeguarding where specific needs are identified, for example the risks to children in road traffic accidents and the use of child car seat restraints. In addition, joint work associated with domestic violence and in responding to increasing demands in respect of child neglect and emotional harm



are also receiving increased attention. Police involvement in the range of child protection and safeguarding activities is suitably proactive.

### **The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe** **Grade 3 (Adequate)**

16. Appropriate action is being taken to ensure that children and young people feel safe. A wide range of initiatives are in place to ensure children and young people feel safe. There are examples of effective strategies to promote good behaviour in schools and other settings through the Healthy Schools initiative, the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme and the personal, social and citizenship curriculum. Children and young people report feeling safe. In particular, those subject to the common assessment procedure who spoke directly with inspectors stated that the process had been helpful to them and suitably inclusive.

17. The local authority monitors the reporting of racist incidents effectively and events, such as theatre performances and workshops, raise awareness of the need for tolerance and understanding. The police make an effective contribution to reducing anti-social behaviour by identifying hotspots and devoting community police officers to encourage more considerate behaviour. They also work well with vulnerable families, particularly those where domestic violence and substance abuse might have an impact on children's safety. Recent surveys of children and young people, including young carers, suggest a significant proportion are concerned about bullying, although they acknowledge it is reducing. Partners are aware that their efforts to combat cyber-bullying have been more successful and appreciated by children, their parents and carers. The analysis of bullying incidents, by age, gender, faith, cultural background or sexual orientation is not comprehensive and, as a result, partners do not have sufficient information to accurately evaluate the impact of their work or to feedback to young people on the approaches that have worked well.

### **The quality of provision** **Grade 3 (Adequate)**

18. The quality of safeguarding service provision is adequate overall. Partnership working to safeguard children, such as in response to domestic abuse in families, is adequate. Although clear and agreed levels for access to safeguarding services are in place actual consistency in practice is more variable and managerial oversight is insufficiently focused on impact and outcomes. There is a degree of duplication of effort in assessment and decision-making arrangements between *First Response* and the local Safeguarding and Family Assessment and Support (FAS) teams.

19. Prompt action is taken to support safeguarding across the partnership demonstrated by the temporary and permanent addition of additional staffing resources in response to increased demands for service. Most referrals to the safeguarding and FAS teams are responded to in a timely manner and cases allocated promptly. However, individual caseloads are often excessive and when combined with the range of work being undertaken impacts negatively on the

quality and timeliness of casework and support. The competing imperatives of short-term family support work and legal proceedings that these teams deliver make the prioritisation and maintenance of work difficult to achieve particularly when the workload volume is at its greatest. Local managers have a good knowledge of individual cases and take appropriate action to balance conflicting demands, particularly at times of greatest pressure. However, the wide range of short and long-term case work demands is, in some instances, adversely affecting the quality and depth of work.

20. Initial and core assessments are generally completed in a timely way and the local authority's performance is at least in line with comparable areas. Staff reported good local management support and supervision but this was not consistently evidenced by inspectors when they evaluated case records. Analysis in core assessments is generally good, but not routinely followed by clear planning objectives which are measurable in terms of impact and outcomes. This is further inhibited by the current report format which although based on the national ICS template makes it hard to determine the assessed needs and risks from the outset.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 3 (Adequate)**

21. Leadership and management of safeguarding services for children and young people are adequate. The council and broader partnership provide clear leadership in safeguarding children. Information sharing protocols, such as those used in the multi-agency risk assessment committee are good. Statutory requirements are followed appropriately and lines of accountability are clear. However, further action is needed across the partnership to strengthen the consistency of response by all partners to safeguarding concerns, and to reduce the potential for duplication of effort in decision-making as cases move from *First Response* to other teams.

22. The use of the CAF in Staffordshire is adequate with some good features. Over 1200 CAF's have been completed since the start of the programme. Lead professionals are represented by all the key agencies and over 3500 practitioners have received training in the use of CAF. The impact of the use of CAF is yet to be fully realised and some issues remain regarding the engagement of all the key agencies and professionals in this work. There is particularly productive cooperation with the Community and Learning Partnerships leading to effective approaches and improved outcomes for children in respect of learning, promoting inclusion and providing access to support services. This is positively recognised by parents. The work of children's centres generally is good and their engagement with the CAF is showing signs of impact. They also provide good access to services for local communities. The well planned and phased development of centres has been carefully targeted on the areas of the county with the greatest need. Within phase 3 developments there is a greater and more appropriate emphasis on out-reach provision, particularly into the more rural areas.

23. The promotion of equality and diversity is adequate. The Children's Trust, SSCB and local partnerships demonstrate a clear commitment to promoting diversity and equality and have extensive knowledge of local needs and populations. There is a good focus on newly arrived families in the east of the county and young asylum seekers with evidence that the educational outcomes of minority ethnic groups is improving. The consequences of forced marriages and extended holidays abroad are also well understood by the District Inclusion Partnerships. Travelling communities receive good educational and welfare support, demonstrated through the Kushti Club, although, at this stage, too few young people transfer to secondary education. The way individual information relating to culture, religion, disability and language is recorded in case records is variable and sometimes difficult to ascertain the weight given to these factors in case planning. The local authority monitors the reporting of racist incidents effectively and events, such as theatre performances and workshops, raise awareness of the need for tolerance and understanding of all communities. The police make a positive contribution to young people's insight on how to keep and stay safe. Hotspots of anti-social behaviour are known and there are good links with vulnerable families, particularly those where domestic violence and substance abuse might have an impact on children's safety. Through surveys, a significant proportion of children and young people say that, although reducing, they remain concerned about bullying. Partners take bullying very seriously. Much is being done to tackle cyber-bullying. However, unlike the evaluation of racist incidents, the analysis of bullying incidents by age, gender, faith, cultural background or sexual orientation is not comprehensive. As a result, partners do not have sufficient information to feedback to young people the actual reality on the ground and what they and adults can collectively do to tackle all forms of bullying and harassment.

24. Parents and carers of children with disabilities feel services have improved over the last couple of years but many also report they often have to "fight for services". The Children's Trust, local partnerships and SSCB remain open to comments by parents and carers and make considerable effort to extend and develop services in response to demand. The provision of support services at the Cannock Resources Centre is an outstanding example of service development and a model for the future re-shaping of provision but families who cannot access this or similar resources often feel frustrated. Parents or carers who have adolescent children with severe complex needs do not currently have sufficient access to recreational activities and short break care. Considerable effort is made to engage users in both individual and service planning through a wide range of consultation arrangements. However, case records did not routinely show how user's views were being used to help shape plans for children. Value-for-money in respect of safeguarding provision is good.

## The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

### Overall effectiveness

### Grade 3 (Adequate)

25. The effectiveness of services for looked after children and young people is adequate overall but with some good and outstanding features. The leadership shown across the partnership has resulted in a shared vision and some agreed priorities for improvement. Statutory requirements are met including those for care assessment, planning, review and social worker visiting. Managers have a track record of steady improvement in most areas with service provision, including improved placement stability, achieving an 'outstanding' judgement for foster care services in the most recent Ofsted inspection and at least 'good' in recent residential provision inspections. Despite these achievements some aspects of joint working between agencies do not always result in sustained improvements in outcomes.

26. Outcomes for children and young people who are looked after are adequate overall and generally in line with comparable areas. Children looked after are suitably safeguarded. However, in some important aspects including the level of teenage conceptions, school exclusions and young people leaving care who are not in education, employment or training, performance objectives are insufficiently stretching or ambitious. Whilst there are some innovative approaches to services for looked after children and arrangements for corporate parenting are good, contributing partners are not routinely contributing to services in order to secure improved outcomes for looked after children or in assuring service quality. A relatively high proportion of children or young people enter care in Staffordshire on an emergency basis (approximately 20%) leading to an increased use of statutory powers and court activity. A relatively high proportion of this group of children are then returned home by courts, sometimes the subjects of care or interim care orders. This process is not only frustrating for the children and young people concerned and their families but also very costly to the authority.

27. Access to recreational activities is good. There are some excellent individual schools, services and voluntary organisations championing success for all looked after children. Celebration of talents and high levels of achievement is well received and appreciated by young people. There is open access to cultural and artistic services, such as the musical experience provided through the "Make Some Noise" project. The Integrated Youth Support Service provides a good range of services for looked after children and young people but take-up and participation is too variable. Looked after children participate well in their case reviews and the rate has increased for a second year to 95% which is higher than similar authorities and the average for England. Reviews are consistently undertaken within the required timescales and performance in this respect is good. The number of looked after young people given a final warning or conviction compared with all children in the area has reduced for a third year.

The number identified as having a substance misuse problem is lower than the England average. Links with the Youth Offending Service are effective with clear protocols that have led to a reduction in first-time entrants to the youth justice system.

### **Capacity for improvement**

### **Grade 3 (Adequate)**

28. The council and its partners have adequate capacity for improvement. The political and managerial leadership across the council and a range of safeguarding agencies demonstrates good ambition and commitment to service improvement. Progress has been made over time to improve and strengthen services to looked after children and in some aspects, such as the high quality of fostering provision and short break care, this has been a major success. However, across the full range of services current performance is not raising the level of performance to a higher comparable level and managers are not using performance management approaches in a consistent way to drive up standards and ensure plans for children and young people are implemented in a timely way. Staff in all agencies working with looked after children are highly committed and well trained but are currently under significant pressure as the number of looked after children continues to rise. Despite additional resources being provided in response to these pressures action to improve prevention, permanency planning and ensuring the 'right' children enter the looked after children system are not as robust as they should be. These weaknesses are not appropriately enabling some children to remain within their families and do not ensure all looked after children and young people make the progress in their lives that they should.

### **Areas for improvement**

29. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and care leavers the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

#### **Within three months:**

- Review the current preventative and diversionary supports available to avoid inappropriate admission to care.
- Ensure individual plans for looked after children are consistently approved by managers and are clearly focused on specific outcomes, set clear and measurable objectives, contain robust timescales, include the views of users and respond to any specific needs by virtue of race, religion, disability or language.
- Improve the consistency of the quality and timeliness of initial health assessments.

**Within six months:**

- Focus joint strategic action to address the high rate of teenage conceptions within the looked after population in order to demonstrate impact in reducing the annual rate and sustaining improvement.
- Increase the number of pupil education plans and pathways plans that are completed and work with young people to ensure their value is fully understood.
- In conjunction with CAFCASS, legal advisers and court officials review the use of statutory powers to take children into the care system, the outcomes of this intervention and the reasons why many of these children are placed back at home.

**Outcomes for children and young people****Grade 3 (Adequate)**

30. Services to promote good health among children in care are adequate. Health partners give priority to looked after children and once an assessment of health needs has been undertaken they have good access to appropriate health services. There is, however, considerable inconsistency in the quality and timeliness of initial health assessments currently provided. This means that some looked after children do not get the service they need as quickly as they should. Recent improvements in triage and service provision in addressing the emotional well-being of children have been positive and access to child and adolescent mental health services is generally good across the county. Effective measures have been implemented to target specific health needs, including those for teenage looked after mothers through integrated services within children's centres. The rate of under 18 year old conceptions is high and has been stubbornly so for a number of years.

31. Children and young people in care are adequately safeguarded in their placements. The focus on matching children to placements and promoting their stability is an important strength. Children's needs are reviewed on time and their views listened to with a clear focus on children's safety. The appointment of a county commissioner for children is ensuring the views of children are utilised more fully in individual and strategic planning and there are good examples where this role is having a positive impact, including within the two YOI's in the county. It is noteworthy that this specific work is aimed at all young people in custody not just those placed by the local authority.

32. Referral and initial assessment processes ensure that the needs of children and foster carers are identified accurately. There is, however, some duplication of effort as cases are transferred from *First Response* to other teams. Looked after children and care leavers report feeling safe and their care arrangements are reviewed in a child-focused way by Independent Reviewing Officers. Care plans are generally up-to-date with suitable multi-agency engagement. However, the care plans analysed by inspectors were not specific enough in respect of outcomes and precise timescales for achieving enduring or permanent family-

based outcomes. Managers, equally, are not routinely authorising care plans or measuring their impact. All looked after children's cases are allocated to suitably qualified social workers and visiting is undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements. Clear, relevant joint protocols are in place to respond to children who go missing from care.

33. The impact of services on enabling looked after children and young people to enjoy and achieve is adequate. Head teachers support the partners' ambition for, and prioritisation of, all looked after children and young people. Improvements are noticeable in the rising attendance rates, now slightly better than the national figure and, with 10% of looked after children missing 25 days schooling, an improvement on the 17% of the previous year. The number of looked after children and young people who are excluded for a fixed period of time is also dropping. However, issues of fixed-term exclusions, including unofficial exclusions, have yet to be addressed as do the levels of attainment to ensure ambition and good progress at all key stages. All partners acknowledge the need to improve the attendance and educational achievement of looked after children and young people. School improvement partners provide high levels of challenge to schools. However, it is acknowledged that governors need more training to review achievement of looked after pupils in their schools. The quality of personal education plans is inconsistent with too many focusing on behaviours and emotional needs at the expense of clear educational goals.

34. The support and challenge to primary schools to meet the educational needs of this particular group of pupils have yet to bear fruit with overall results at age 11 below those of similar authorities and the national average for looked after children. The gap with all pupils aged 11 in the county is not narrowing. Outcomes at age 16 are improving and results are similar to those of comparable areas for those achieving five good GCSE (A\* to C) passes. The District Inclusion Partnerships monitor attendance and behaviour issues effectively. They provide a school place, alternative education or training provision as a matter of urgency. They also intervene proactively to avoid exclusions and no looked after pupil was permanently excluded this school year.

35. Opportunities for looked after children and young people to make a positive contribution are good. Joint work with looked after children and young people to ensure they make a positive contribution is good. A range of initiatives, such as those funded through the European Social Fund and those targeted at teenage mothers contribute to this. The Integrated Youth Support Service has a range of attractive offers but there is scope to deliver more targeted opportunities, fully enabling looked after children and young people to take part. Their participation in statutory reviews has increased for a second year to 95% and this is higher than similar authorities and the average for England. These reviews are undertaken within the required timescales. The number of looked after young people given a final warning or conviction compared with all children in the area has reduced for a third year running and highlights the effective joint working of youth offending agencies and the police. All partners link well with the Youth Offending Service and there has been a year-on-year reduction in the rate of

offending and re-offending. The number of first-time entrants to the Youth Justice System is also reducing. Partnership working with the police is active and positive. The number of looked after young people identified as having a substance misuse problem is lower than the England average.

36. The impact of agencies in enabling looked after children and young people to achieve economic well-being are adequate. Good progress is being made to engage young people in education, employment or training. Out of 45 young people leaving Year 11 in 2008, 63% went into full-time education and 21% into full or part-time training. The percentage of those unemployed at 16% is lower than the 26% of the previous year. This compares well with similar areas. Arrangements are in place to continue to increase the range of 14-19 provision. The web-based area prospectus, the good support of Connexions staff and courses such as "Foundation for Employment" are good examples of improved breadth of provision. Transition planning is satisfactory but some young people remain concerned about their future and not all see the benefit of their personal adviser or pathway plans. The percentage of eligible young people with a pathway plan has not increased significantly over the past three years and, at 75%, is lower than statistical neighbours and the England average. Improving transition for young people, including those with complex learning and physical disabilities, remains a key priority of the Children's Trust. The number of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in education, employment or training matches the figures for similar authorities and England.

37. School improvement partners undertake a thorough analysis of achievements for young people aged 16 years and over and a sophisticated process for tracking information of young people post-16 is in place. Staffordshire has one of the lowest 'not known' rates in the country and Connexions Staffordshire has the lowest recorded number of errors for Aspire. However, tracking arrangements for the 16 looked-after teenage girls who are young mothers or pregnant are less robust.

### **The quality of provision**

### **Grade 3 (Adequate)**

38. Service responsiveness is adequate with active efforts being made to monitor, understand and factor into service planning the changing needs and service demands. Arrangements for supporting the well-being of looked after children are nearly always achieved with a focus on individual consultation, advocacy and achieving timely outcomes to representations. There is a strong commitment to adapting and developing looked after services to more adequately meet the needs and wishes of children.

39. The assessment of and direct work with looked after children are adequate, being usually timely, mostly identifying the needs of children with evidence of direct work with them in the areas identified. The quality of analysis and evaluation of need do not currently identify the most critical areas requiring improvement or change. There is some evidence of managerial involvement and oversight but this is not always timely, sufficient or focused. Care plans are,



generally clear but there is evidence of some delay in their implementation resulting in a lack of understanding in some instances of aims and objectives, responsibilities and expectations.

40. Arrangements for planning, case review and recording are adequate with a robust focus on meeting statutory requirements. On the whole adequate efforts are made in achieving stability for children but the plans analysed by inspectors did not always include robust analysis and timely, succinct recording or a clear timescale for achieving a permanent placement outcome. Local managers do not undertake sufficient evaluations of the work of their teams so that trends in respect of looked after children entering the care system on an emergency basis or the reasons for placement delays for some children where adoption has been deemed to be in their best interests can be identified.

### **Leadership and management**

### **Grade 3 (Adequate)**

41. Leadership and management of services for looked after children and young people are adequate overall. Political and managerial leadership across the partnership is having increasing effectiveness in improving outcomes for looked after children with visible ambition and prioritisation for services. Corporate parenting is good overall with a clear commitment to safeguarding looked after children and care leavers. More focused commissioning arrangements are beginning to take place. The essential requirements of the service are secured despite the extended decision-making and lines of accountability sometimes lead to unnecessary duplication of effort.

42. Performance management and workforce development ensure performance targets are met and reviewed. There is, however, some inconsistency in terms of the quality of input and the impact of actions within individual interventions and services. The main reason for this lies with local managers who are not sufficiently clear about what needs to be achieved and how progress towards them will be monitored. There is a strong drive for an improving workforce and a wide range of management and development approaches deployed.

43. A determined and developing commitment to participation at all stages of the looked after children experience is a strength in terms of user engagement. The establishment of children's and parents' commissioner roles are significant developments that are showing good impact in a range of participation and consultation processes and ensuring vulnerable children's voices are heard. There is, however, inconsistency in the use of the views of children and their families on services and outcomes. The views of these groups are not always recorded in all plans. Children and young people report satisfaction with the respectful treatment they receive by those charged with their care. Effective commissioning arrangements are in place with careful attention being paid to the purchase of external placements and whether these provide value-for-money. All placements are closely monitored by contracts staff in respect of placement aims and whether these aims are being achieved. There is a good focus on

safeguarding looked after children placed out-of-area and cases are regularly reviewed by independent reviewing officers.

44. Partnership working is generally effective both at a strategic and operational level. Voluntary organisations play a significant and valued role in the county and indicate they are well supported by statutory partners through the provision of training and are also well represented on strategic boards and other planning structures. There are good examples of effective partnership working aimed at looked after children and young people including an emerging commissioning framework that includes the purchasing and tendering of services. Pooled budgets and the securing of value-for-money are aspects of joint working that are not yet fully demonstrated although this is an area that is currently being developed.

45. The promotion of equality and diversity is adequate. There are extensive consultation opportunities and examples of young people influencing service development and decision-making and considerable efforts are made to act on their views. In some instances, however, insufficient attention is paid to children's cultural, ethnic origin or religious background. In some of the case records analysed by inspectors the family could not understand English, but records did not note whether an interpreter was needed or provided and whether any documentation was provided in a language or format that would be understood. The council's knowledge of its children and young people's population is on the whole secure and the variety of needs known.

46. Children's centres provide a good range of services to local neighbourhoods and the Community and Learning Partnerships have precise knowledge of their areas. They are working to ensure that diverse needs are met, for example those of newly arrived communities in the east of the county and young asylum seekers. A strong focus on diversity is having a positive impact on the educational outcomes of minority ethnic groups. The consequences of forced marriages and extended holidays abroad are well understood by the District Inclusion Partnerships. The travelling community receives good educational and welfare support, demonstrated through the Kushti Club, but too few young people transfer to secondary education.

47. Despite a range of positive initiatives some equality of opportunities challenges remain for some groups of young people. Parents and carers of children with disabilities feel services have improved over the last couple of years and parents appreciate the level of support they now receive. The Aiming High for Disabled Children initiative is starting to show some improvement to services and the Jigsaw charity for autistic children is an example of effective provision. The case files examined by inspectors during the inspection identify the ethnic origin of children and their families, but assessments do not always take sufficient account of these issues in individual planning.

## Record of main findings: Staffordshire

<b>Safeguarding services</b>	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Good
<b>Outcomes for children and young people</b>	
Children and young people are safe: effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe	Adequate
Children and young people feel safe: effectiveness of services in helping to ensure that children and young people feel safe	Adequate
<b>Quality of provision</b>	
Service responsiveness including complaints	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children and families	Adequate
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
<b>Leadership and management</b>	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Adequate
User engagement	Good
Partnerships	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Adequate
Value for money	Good

<b>Services for looked after children</b>	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Adequate
<b>Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers</b>	
Being healthy	Adequate
Staying safe	Adequate
Enjoying and achieving	Adequate
Making a positive contribution	Good
Economic well-being	Adequate
<b>Quality of provision</b>	
Service responsiveness	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children	Adequate
Case planning, review and recording	Adequate
Looked after children are safeguarded	Adequate
<b>Leadership and management</b>	
Ambition and prioritisation	Adequate
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Adequate
User engagement	Adequate
Partnerships	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Adequate
Value for money	Adequate