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Anthony Douglas
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Dear Anthony,

**Post inspection review:
Ofsted inspection of Cafcass East Midlands 2008**

This letter contains the findings of the final post-inspection review for this inspection carried out by Ofsted. The review assessed progress made by Cafcass in implementing recommendations arising from the inspection *Ofsted's inspection of Cafcass East Midlands: key challenges and opportunities 2008*. I would like to thank you and your staff for the assistance you provided to Jeremy Gleaden HMI in carrying out this review.

The evidence provided at the October mid-point meeting demonstrated that Cafcass had made satisfactory progress on many areas identified for improvement. However due to continued concerns about the issues related to safeguarding children, the overall progress at that time was inadequate.

Having considered the further evidence provided by Cafcass, Ofsted judges that **satisfactory** progress has been made in all of the 10 recommendations.

OUTCOME OF THE INSPECTION

Ofsted's inspection of Cafcass East Midlands: key challenges and opportunities was published in February 2008. The inspection report made 10 recommendations to Cafcass covering:



- quality of case planning and recording
- guidance in assessing drug using parents
- guidance in the application of the 'no order principle'
- assuring the quality of safeguarding practice
- strengthening quality assurance
- effectiveness of supervision
- information for service users on how to complain
- management priorities
- collaborative work with partner agencies
- the impact of training.

Since 2008, Cafcass has restructured its operational services. The former East Midlands region of Cafcass has been replaced by three service areas which cover the East Midlands and a broader geographical area. The post-inspection review was undertaken with the senior manager responsible for the whole of the central area and the three heads of service.

Findings of the review:

Recommendation 1: Cafcass should take steps to ensure good quality of case recording and that accountability is demonstrable through effective management oversight

This recommendation arises from the inspection findings that almost two thirds of case plans did not demonstrate sufficient analysis of information and that case records, at best, only recorded information about process.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- The implementation and roll out of a new national Cafcass recording policy.
- Local priorities defined to address file storage; ensure all staff have read the policy; ensure all files are in the new format; and concentrate on the quality of contact records.
- The development of a new consistent assessment framework for private law cases.
- A new performance management system, 'Quality 4 Children' (Q4C) which went live in October 2008. This requires all staff to have an individual development plan. Q4C is moving towards full implementation that requires service managers to routinely examine two files prior to supervision and grade the quality of family court advisor (FCA) work.
- Cafcass Legal has provided recording master-class sessions across the area and quality improvement managers are running local workshops to support improvements followed up by individual work.
- An audit of practice identified the FCAs judged to be the weakest performers; a follow-up management review of all cases was identified for 12 staff; plans to



ensure a 10:1 service manager to FCA ratio are being progressed but have not yet been achieved in every area.

- Central Area has an ongoing rolling programme of audits steered by the Head of Service Quality Improvement and the quality improvement team.
- A national audit of duty systems involves an unannounced visit by a member of a national team that is independent of the area – every office will be audited by the end of May. Nottingham, Leicester, and Derby audits are complete and received a satisfactory grading.
- File audits undertaken within the region showed the proportion of cases judged to be satisfactory. A regional average performance of 71.2% for compliance with the record-keeping policy was reported in October 2008; this had risen to 94.2% satisfactory or better at the time of this review.
- Examples of case plans submitted provided evidence of management oversight, direct observation of practice, reflective practice and feedback to staff. While all four clearly identify the issues, the quality varied from good planning, which clearly identified what would be done and what was intended, to no planning or merely providing a list of tasks.

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue. Performance suggests the quality of case files and recording is improving, with some teams achieving a good standard. The audit activity is effective management practice and it is good that this has led to targeted action being taken to address deficits in specific staff competence and effectiveness. A key inspection finding was that quality assurance processes were ineffective and unchallenging. Ofsted has seen evidence of improved management oversight of case work and effective challenge to weak or inadequate practice.

Recommendation 2: Cafcass should update its practice guidance on the assessment of drug-using parents in relation to contact.

This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that the practice of assessing parents who were using class C drugs seeking contact with their children was ineffective in assessing risk of harm.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- Risk assessment training was provided to all Central Area managers prior to practitioner training to ensure that they can lead practice in their teams. Every manager attended. This included the SCODA (Standing Conference on Drug Abuse) tool as the means to undertake specific assessments in relation to drug use. One practitioner event per area was provided last year and further events will be provided in the training schedule for this year.
- New practice guidance on drug using parents is now available to staff on the Cafcass intranet.



Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue in so far as guidance is available to inform practice. Examples of practice provided as evidence to support this recommendation showed practitioners working with families where drug use was an issue, with a clear recommendation being made to the court in the best interests of the child. However, they did not demonstrate use of the assessment models designed for this purpose.

Recommendation 3: Cafcass should update its guidance for practitioners about the application of the no order principle and ensure this is underpinned by necessary training.

This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that in most private law reports the 'no order' principle was given insufficient attention and that practitioners failed to give reasons why it was better to make an order in the case.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- The national report template has been updated regarding the no order principle. This new quality assurance tool requires managers to make a judgment and comment on its use.
- The new assessment framework addresses the no order principle.
- Auditing of reports and report writing workshops/training events continues. In terms of increased understanding and confidence from staff, Cafcass reports this is ongoing work and that Ofsted's criticism of the analysis and recommendations template was helpful and is receiving national attention.

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue.

Recommendation 4: In order to ensure all Cafcass child protection and safeguarding practices are of an adequate standard, a thorough audit should be undertaken of the work across all teams, to ensure this work is subject to rigorous quality assurance and compliant with guidance.

This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that there was an unacceptably high incidence of cases that demonstrated failure by Cafcass to safeguard children and young people.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- A file audit of compliance against safeguarding requirements showed a regional average of 82.5% of case files to be judged as satisfactory or better in October 2008. By the time of this review, this had risen to 98.9%.
- As part of the audit of FCA work referred to under recommendation 1, 12 FCAs were identified as being inadequate in some aspects of their work, including



safeguarding. Clear actions were planned for each FCA and progress continues to be closely monitored, with evidence of improvement.

- The Nottingham duty system has been audited and found satisfactory in terms of safeguarding.
- Performance against almost all performance indicators is good.
- Examples of case work were submitted and, in one case, a children's guardian demonstrated a very clear and robust challenge, on child protection grounds, to the local authority plan and clearly set out expectations for the local authority for protection, contact and placement suitability.

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue. The range of activity and focus of intervention demonstrates that Cafcass has taken this recommendation seriously and continued to monitor the performance of the workforce with particular focus on those identified as weakest.

Recommendation 5: In order to strengthen the quality assurance of reports to court and to raise overall reporting standards, Cafcass should review its use of peer participation and introduce more robust arrangements including an increased role for senior managers.

This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that Cafcass quality assurance systems were ineffective in identifying and rectifying inadequate practice, particularly when reporting to court.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- Data from case file audits demonstrated that most quality of analysis (94%) and recommendations (91%) were satisfactory or better in October 2008. At the time of the review 98.2% of reports were satisfactory or better.
- Peer reviewing of reports has ceased. This is now a service manager responsibility and funding has been secured to move to a 1:10 ratio of managers to practitioners. Individual reports are quality assured, graded and recorded on Quality 4 Children (Q4C). Overall reporting skills are graded and recorded on Q4C via supervision, and service manager auditing is quality checked by Heads of Service and the internal audit programme.

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue. The audit of files demonstrated appropriate management practice to quality assure reports. Cafcass's own performance data shows that the quality of reports is improving.

Recommendation 6: In order to improve management of performance and quality of practice, Cafcass should review and strengthen its guidance, particularly round the role and responsibilities of managers, in support of the supervision policy.



This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that Cafcass's approach to supervision discouraged constructive criticism or challenge leading to a lack of practice improvement.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- All service managers had completed the supervision training. The service manager development training has provided useful feedback for heads of service to use in their supervision and development of service managers.
- Heads of service are observing service managers undertaking supervision.
- Cafcass had developed a template for observation of supervision, but this was not a nationally agreed tool. The tool covers: structure and process, case management, intervention work and development.
- Cafcass has implemented the policy in agreement with the union that only staff who are assessed as satisfactory will be eligible for pay progression. Currently 8% of staff will not progress at this stage

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue. A number of examples of supervision notes were submitted as evidence. Throughout, there were examples of clear challenge to weak or inadequate practice, which were not evident at the time of the inspection. However, the quality of some supervision recording still fell below an acceptable standard with a lack of clear SMART action planning.¹ Cafcass self-evaluated progress against this recommendation as good. Ofsted has seen evidence in this review, supported by evidence from inspection elsewhere in Cafcass, that some managers are grading the quality of work higher than inspectors, particularly judging work good when it is satisfactory.

Recommendation 7: Cafcass needs to ensure that information about complaints reaches the significant minority of service users who report that they do not know how to make a complaint.

This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that more than a third of Cafcass service users reported that they had not been told how to complain.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included:

- Cafcass's management of complaints is a national function, which had recently been restructured. The national service has a Learning Action Panel which disseminates learning from complaints and serious case reviews.
- The Central Sector has not received much recent feedback from service users.
- Practice observation of FCAs was focusing on the first interview, which was enabling managers to assess how well FCAs inform service users about their right to complain and the process to do so.

¹ Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely.



- Cafcass nationally was developing a 'welcome pack' for new service users together with HMCS that will include information about complaints.
- A new welcome pack was introduced by Cafcass from 1 April 09 and a new portal on the external website allows service users easy communication with the organisation. Cafcass reports that this has met any outstanding concern around the quality of information provided at the outset of work with families.

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue.

Recommendation 8: In the context of organisational change, Cafcass should ensure service managers understand and implement stated priorities to address the improvement agenda.

This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that leadership and management was failing to have sufficient impact on improving practice and quality assuring Cafcass's work.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- All service managers had received the organisation's priorities and these had been used by heads of service in setting appraisal targets. Cafcass confirmed these reflected those stated during the inspection of East Midlands: allocation of work, supervision, appraisal and responding to complaints.
- Senior leadership messages about management priorities have been clear and unambiguous. Heads of service have received clear written minimum expectations.
- A 'cascade' model has been introduced to ensure that decisions taken by senior management are cascaded through the organisation via area meetings to heads of service area management and then to team meetings.
- There have been significant changes in service manager personnel with two managers moved from operational management to project work more suited to their strengths, one has chosen to leave and one is currently suspended.
- The six-weekly service improvement meetings in each area, chaired by the Operational Director, ensure area management teams are clear on the short-term and longer-term priorities and actions required.

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue. The organisational priorities particularly associated with practice improvement are evident in many of the documents, including performance management and quality assurance documents, seen as part of this review.

Recommendation 9: Cafcass should explore further opportunities for collaborative work with those partners it has a contract with or grant aids.

This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that some partners reported a lack of engagement with Cafcass.



Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- Partnership working is now led by a national team. The new provisions of the Children and Adoption Act 2006 regarding contact activities have taken precedence in this area. These should provide for opportunities for local organisations to work more constructively and imaginatively with Cafcass, but this will be on the basis of formal commissioning against national developments.

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue. Action to address this recommendation is in part being addressed by the national organisation. It is appropriate that the new statutory requirements regarding contact activities are the focus of this work.

Recommendation 10: Cafcass should develop systems to measure the impact and outcome of staff training, to capture this and ensure learning is embedded in practice.

This recommendation arises from the inspection finding that Cafcass lacked knowledge of the impact and outcome of staff training.

Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included the following.

- Nationally a system is being developed to collect information about the impact of training on practice three to six months after the training event. This is part of the Q4C system, where line managers will log learning action points from supervision. Cafcass has commissioned research on the impact of the risk training. This is not yet complete but will be published when available.
- There is evidence of high levels of initial satisfaction with training.
- Individual learning accounts (ILA) had been established and use of this must reflect each individual's individual learning plan and can only be accessed through the approval of the service manager. All staff now need service managers' permission to withdraw from training and any failure to attend is systematically recorded and reported on. ILAs are being used imaginatively, with examples including teams pooling resources to fund team days to consolidate learning on risk assessment.

Satisfactory progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue.



The letter to report on this final visit will be published on the Ofsted website by 12 June 2009 and sent to the Sponsorship Unit in the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

Yours sincerely



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