Inspection of Newham local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 November 2025

Lead inspector: Ceri Evans, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	**Grade**
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

Children in Newham continue to benefit from consistently effective services that improve and enhance their experiences. Since the last inspection in 2022, when the overall effectiveness judgement was good, senior leaders have continued to strengthen and improve services to benefit children and their families. When children are identified as being at risk, there is a very effective response to children. Equally, children in care and care leavers receive excellent support and benefit from very stable relationships with their workers who know them extremely well. The highly ambitious and accessible senior leadership team has driven high-quality, child-centred practice across all service areas. Clear strategic leadership, strong political support for children's services, well-established partnerships and investment in the workforce have created positive working conditions that enable frontline practitioners to make a real difference to children's lives.

A standout feature is the impressive focus on children remaining within their kinship networks, and on ensuring that their voices are central to planning and decision-making. The ongoing investment in the clinical team and the social work academy has undoubtedly strengthened practice and contributed to a culture of learning and

development. Workers show an in-depth knowledge of the authority's practice model and are able to articulate the positive impact this has had on consistency and the quality of practice with children and their families.

What needs to improve?[1]

- The effectiveness of permanence planning, particularly early permanence through foster to adopt, so that every child has a positive sense of security and belonging where they live. (outcome 4, national framework)

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: outstanding

1. Children and families are offered highly effective early help and support when their needs are first identified. Thresholds are appropriately and consistently applied and understood. Children and their families access the right level of help at the right time, so that they do not receive statutory intervention unnecessarily. Effective multi-agency information-sharing supports robust decision-making, which is making a positive difference to children's lives.

2. Families benefit from access to an extensive range of supportive and accessible services and helpful staff. Early Help practitioners in the MASH remain an essential gateway to services for families, ensuring appropriate triaging to identify the right service and providing effective oversight of referrals that progress to family hubs and children's centres, family support teams and universal services. Early help practitioners work collaboratively and openly with children, young people and families. This is underpinned by the relational and strengths-based model of practice, which helps workers to explore and understand children's lived experiences and to develop effective and sustainable solutions to successfully address need.

3. Early help assessments are comprehensive and well written. These assessments consider the important things for the child and include their family's history and wider needs. Children receive timely and proportionate support. For many, this prevents their needs escalating and results in positive experiences for them and their parents.

4. A well-managed and efficient multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) ensures that contacts from the public or professionals are met with a timely and appropriate response. Social workers and managers make sound decisions, based on historical information, to ensure that children are helped and protected. The rationale for decisions is well recorded in children's records. Screening processes

[1] The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the Children's Social Care: National Framework. This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

within the MASH are well established, and work is progressed at pace, with clear and effective management oversight, challenge and direction.

5. The well-established emergency duty team responds appropriately to concerns that arise out of office hours. Children receive a rapid response when there are safeguarding concerns. This includes convening child protection strategy meetings out of hours so that multi-agency decisions about the protection of children can be made quickly.

6. Assessments of children's needs are consistently strong, suitably analytical and provide a powerful insight into the lives of children and families. They routinely draw on information from relevant partner agencies and children themselves. Social workers build a thorough understanding of children's family networks. They use this insight proactively to support children and minimise risk. Information gathered is analysed well, providing a clear rationale for next steps and well-informed plans for children.

7. Leaders understand the very diverse community which they serve. They recognise that children from black and global majority backgrounds are overrepresented among those referred to children services. Consequently, leaders are engaging with a wide range of partners and undertaking thematic audits to better understand the issues and examine practice and decision-making. Particular attention is being given to children's individual identities and cultural needs, ensuring that gender, cultural practices, ethnicity and faith are fully considered.

8. Disabled children receive an effective service. Strong and enduring relationships mean that children's needs are identified, and the provision of support packages improves their circumstances. Social workers visit children regularly and capture their views well using a wide range of bespoke communication methods. Social workers liaise closely with partner agencies to prioritise children's wider welfare and provide access to resources in their communities.

9. When children are at risk of harm, the safeguarding team swiftly convenes multi-agency child protection strategy meetings. These are well attended by partner agencies, informing clear plans. Child protection investigations are timely and thorough and include the views of parents and children. Analysis of risks and needs is detailed and results in sound recommendations for next steps.

10. When children are subject to a child-in-need or child protection plan, multi-agency review meetings are attended by relevant professionals who are involved with them. These meetings are effective forums for thorough information-sharing, planning and decision-making for children and their families.

11. Social workers know children extremely well. They visit children regularly and see them alone. Creative direct work helps children to begin to understand their experiences, their identity and their wishes and feelings. Social workers also build

positive relationships with parents, enabling honest and open conversations with them regarding their children. Wider family networks are increasingly part of child-in-need or child protection planning from an early stage. Safety plans are well crafted with families, so that help is available to children from people who they know and trust.

12. Social work practice with children is relationship based. Work with families reflects a collaborative ethos; children and their families are very well engaged and supported by professionals to participate at every stage. Children's plans are very clear about what needs to change. They set out achievable timescales so that children and families can understand what they and the professionals involved need to do to achieve positive change.

13. Children exposed to domestic abuse are recognised and swift and effective action is taken to protect them. Intervention is supported by the well-embedded practice model, and workers are increasingly using specialised practice tools to assist their work with parents and children. This is having a powerful impact on helping parents to understand what life is like for their children and the impact on them of witnessing domestic abuse.

14. Neglect and its impact on children are recognised and responded to effectively. Early identification of concerns leads to swift, coordinated action to address harm. Direct work is purposeful and helps children talk about how neglect affects them.

15. When risks are not reducing, children benefit from timely decisions to escalate into pre-proceedings and care proceedings. Senior managers maintain a thorough and effective overview of the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline. Work with the families involved is highly effective, so that an increasing number of children are able to step out of pre-proceedings successfully and safely.

16. Children at risk of exploitation and those who go missing from home receive a strong, multi-agency response that helps to reduce their risks and needs. Action to protect children who experience criminal or sexual exploitation is well coordinated and robust. A wide range of relevant professionals and services work with children. This ensures that risks for children are accurately identified, and interventions are targeted effectively to mitigate or reduce risks.

17. The local authority designated officer provides a coordinated response to allegations against professionals working with children. Swift and robust decision-making ensures that plans are in place to safeguard children.

18. When children aged 16 and 17 years old present as potentially homeless, there is a highly responsive and child-centred approach to assessing their needs. An improved protocol and practice guidance have strengthened staff responses to this vulnerable cohort of children. Whenever possible, children are supported to remain within family networks. If this is not possible, workers complete holistic assessments that identify and lead to the supports they need. Children are

informed of their rights and entitlements, with accommodation options explored, including the option of becoming cared for.

19. There are low numbers of children who are known to be privately fostered. Targeted awareness-raising with internal stakeholders and external partners has led to an increase in private fostering notifications and general enquiries. An effective response ensures that children known to live in these arrangements are supported appropriately and living in homes that meet their needs.

20. There is a well-coordinated multi-agency response for children who are electively home educated or missing from education. Where children are missing from education, staff take effective action to identify their whereabouts, secure a school place or take enforcement action when needed. A comprehensive strategy to improve school attendance has had a positive impact for vulnerable children who are subject to an early help, child-in-need or child protection plan, and who have had persistent and severe absences.

The experiences and progress of children in care: outstanding

21. Children in care receive an outstanding service from workers who know them exceptionally well and are caring and ambitious for them. Children only come into care when it is necessary and appropriate for them to do so. There is an exceptionally strong commitment to support children to remain with their families, and a broad range of high-quality edge of care services is in place to achieve this, providing children and their families with the best opportunity to stay together and to live safely and happily. The focus on reunification is equally strong and has resulted in a number of children being supported to return home to their families. Children in care are very well supported to cope with the impact of earlier trauma. Sustained investment in the edge of care service and the clinical practice team means that children and their carers benefit from effective face-to-face support, which helps them to build resilience and develop stronger relationships.

22. Applications to the family court are mostly timely. Good-quality assessments, statements and care plans support effective decision-making for children. The judiciary and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service told inspectors that practice has improved greatly in Newham, highlighting work of consistently good quality that has resulted in the right outcomes for children.

23. Children settle well in stable homes that meet their needs. Placement stability for children is strong. Workers respond swiftly and appropriately when placements are at risk of disruption. Ongoing support for carers, including access to specialist advice, helps them to manage challenges confidently. As a result, disruption rates have reduced, and children benefit from greater stability.

24. Most children in care, including disabled children, make excellent progress. They live in stable and nurturing settings, be it with long-term foster carers, kinship carers, special guardians or in specialist residential settings. Inspectors saw many

examples of children thriving in well-matched placements, where they experience safety, emotional security and a sense of belonging.

25. Leaders and workers share a strong focus on securing permanence for children at the earliest opportunity. Permanence planning starts immediately when children enter care, whether towards a return to their parents, to live within their family networks or permanence away from the family. A range of permanence meetings and panels have strengthened oversight since the last inspection, helping to achieve more timely permanent homes for most children. Work has begun between the regional adoption agency (Adopt London East) and the local authority on improving timeliness in family finding. However, for a small number of children a lack of prospective adopters, particularly those who will consider early permanence placements, has resulted in delays and uncertainty for them before they move in with their adoptive families.

26. When it is safe and in their best interests, children in care are supported to return home to the care of their parents. The edge of care team provides effective support to children and their parents to achieve successful return home plans. These arrangements are carefully considered, with oversight from senior managers, ensuring that there is a clear rationale for decisions and children's progress is closely monitored and supported.

27. Hearing the voice of the child is a key strength in Newham. Children experience highly effective direct work that is purposeful, sensitive and tailored to their individual needs. Social workers know their children extremely well and spend meaningful time with them, helping them to express their wishes, understand their experiences and to make sense of past, present and future plans. The continuity of worker has improved significantly since the last inspection. This provides children with a consistent and trusted adult who understands their history and advocates strongly on their behalf.

28. Independent reviewing officers consistently visit children before their cared-for reviews to directly ascertain their wishes and feelings. Children participate in their reviews. They are helped to understand the decisions taken about their care, who will help them to continue to make progress and how this will be achieved.

29. Children in care who are at risk of exploitation benefit from effective multi-agency information-sharing and planning. Children who go missing are offered timely return home interviews which explore the reasons for their going missing and inform future planning.

30. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who arrive in Newham are swiftly found homes where they can feel safe. Children are allocated a social worker who is skilled in working with unaccompanied children. Children are living in suitable placements that meet their needs. Their cultural, linguistic and religious identities are carefully considered, and are well documented in their plans. When needed,

social workers ensure that interpreting services and culturally appropriate advocates are used so that children can share their views.

31. Children's health needs, including complex health needs, are identified, and met when they come into care. Children and their carers access a broad range of support, including therapeutic help provided by specialist well-being workers that promotes their emotional well-being and further strengthens the care provided to them.

32. The virtual school is ambitious for children in care and is ensuring that children gain access to the best possible education. The quality of children's personal education plans has continued to strengthen since the last inspection. Staff from the virtual school know their children well and understand their needs. The virtual school team works very closely with children's social workers, designated teachers and foster carers. This means that children make good educational and social progress within stable, well-supported educational settings.

33. Family time arrangements reflect children's needs and are reviewed and changed when required. A high priority is given to helping children to maintain links to their family and friends, supporting their sense of identity and strengthening significant relationships for them. Newham's 'Circles of Support' family meetings, a key part of a practice model developed by the local authority, are successful in bringing extended families together to create sustainable plans for reunification. These meetings provide a space where relatives can discuss and begin to understand the child's experiences, identify protective factors and consider what practical help is needed to ensure that reunification has every chance to succeed.

34. Children's written plans are of high quality. Plans are sensitively written with the voice of the child clearly captured. Written plans consider children's cultural, identity and emotional health needs. Social workers understand and articulate the progress children have made well. Children's needs and experiences are brought to life with such warmth and clarity in their records that their individuality truly jumps off the page.

35. At the time of the inspection, no children were living in unregistered children's homes. When these arrangements are very occasionally used, the frequency of visits increases and senior leaders have robust oversight of children's welfare, and persistent efforts are taken to move children on to registered children's homes as quickly as possible.

36. Thorough panel processes support the recruitment of prospective foster carers and adopters. Foster carers, adopters and kinship carers receive excellent support, and they have access to a wide range of formal and informal support networks. While joint working between the regional adoption agency (Adopt London East) and children's social workers is strong, leaders recognise that there is more to do in partnership with the agency to recruit more adopters.

37. A well-established children in care council provides opportunities for children in care and care leavers to have their views heard on the services they receive. Direct engagement by the corporate parenting panel with children in care and care leavers has been strengthened. Children and young people are represented on the main board. They have a meaningful and purposeful voice in the development of services, such as the introduction of the role of young auditors to help leaders assess the quality of practice.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: outstanding

38. Council members, senior leaders and the workforce share a strong commitment to Newham care leavers. Leaders have created a culture in which young people remain at the heart of practice long after they leave care, ensuring that support does not lessen as they transition into adulthood.

39. Personal advisers (PAs) build strong and enduring relationships with care leavers, providing consistent guidance, support and advocacy. PAs certainly understand each of their young people's needs, aspirations and vulnerabilities, and they fiercely champion their rights. There is a strong culture where care leavers are encouraged to stay in contact with their PA long after they turn 21 or to return to the service if they need to. The door is very much left open.

40. PAs and social workers liaise effectively to ensure that the leaving care service begins to work with children early. This early allocation and involvement of PAs means that children develop a trusting relationship with their new worker before their transition to adulthood.

41. Care leavers benefit from a wide range of high-quality services that promote their emotional well-being, education, employment and independence at a dedicated space called the Cove. The Cove is a key point of connection for young people to speak with their PAs, learn new skills or connect socially with each other. The Cove also provides access to workspaces, a fully working kitchen, showers and a chill-out space with games. Drop-in sessions and training are also provided on a range of subjects, including sexual health, cooking, CV writing and interview skills. Care leavers themselves told inspectors that the Cove has become a place that they love visiting. They feel comfortable spending time there and enjoy meeting up with their PAs and their peers.

42. Pathway plans are very well written and are of an excellent quality. They are co-produced with young people and updated on a regular basis to reflect their needs. Plans are written sensitively and highly personalised. They provide a clear account of young people's individual needs, aspirations and the challenges they face. Plans set out clearly achievable goals across all key areas, such as education, employment, housing, identity, emotional health and well-being. Goals are aspirational, while also promoting young people's independence, resilience and confidence. Care leavers are encouraged to have a 'can-do' approach to life; they are encouraged to believe in themselves and in what they can achieve.

43. Care leavers spoken with during the inspection said that they feel safe and secure where they live. They are supported to move towards independence at a pace appropriate to their individual needs. A comprehensive range of housing options for care leavers, considered through joint assessment by children's and housing services, ensures that care leavers have accommodation that meets their needs. Nearly all care leavers live in safe, stable and suitable accommodation that is well matched to their needs. A good number continue to live with their foster carers in 'staying put' arrangements, allowing them to remain with carers whom they feel comfortable with and know well.

44. The care leaver local offer is comprehensive and easy to understand. It has recently been refreshed in consultation with care leavers. A key issue raised by care leavers was digital poverty. In response, the offer was changed and it now includes free Wi-Fi as young people move into their permanent homes. Other elements include financial support, council tax exemption, including for those living out of the borough, free gym membership and support with travel passes. Care leavers understand their health histories and are helped to obtain important documents, such as passports.

45. Care leavers are supported well in their education, training, apprenticeships and employment. They receive careers advice and guidance to help them make the right choices for their futures. They are helped to apply for higher education, and a growing number of care leavers are in higher education. Whatever their chosen pathway, care leavers are given the support they need to stay engaged and to succeed in life.

46. Tackling loneliness among care leavers is a high priority for leaders. They recognise the impact that social isolation can have on young people's emotional well-being and mental health. They have ensured that care leavers have regular opportunities to meet each other, develop a network and have many positive opportunities to connect with peers. A dedicated leaving care specialist nurse supports care leavers on a range of issues, including isolation and depression. Additional assistance is also provided by the clinical practice team, helping to ensure that care leavers have the support they need at the right time.

47. PAs are well attuned to indicators of risk in the lives of care leavers, and they play an integral role in supporting responses to enhance their safety. They work collaboratively with care leavers to develop practical safety plans, offering clear guidance on issues such as online safety, substance misuse and managing relationships. This approach is helping care leavers to build the skills and confidence needed to make informed and safer decisions.

48. Care leavers who are pregnant or who are young parents receive excellent help and support. PAs are sensitive to their needs and work closely with them to provide practical guidance on childcare and housing, and to help them face the

emotional challenges of being a new parent. The Cove also links with the local family hub to offer bespoke services to care leavers who are parents, including parenting support, classes and help to find nursery places so that they can continue with their education and/or employment.

49. Care leavers in custody are very well supported by their PAs, who visit them on a regular basis. PAs are strong advocates for them and are persistent in providing practical and emotional help. Close links with probation services help to ensure that appropriate support is in place when care leavers leave custody.

50. Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are now care leavers experience proactive support to help them achieve their goals and succeed in education and training. Their identity needs are well considered and supported. Highly skilled workers sensitively balance the complex needs of these young people. They understand their need for stability and are attuned to their vulnerabilities, including any risks of trafficking and emotional and physical harm.

51. Inspectors met with an impressive group of care leavers who spoke openly about their experiences. Many reflected that they feel very well supported by the service and are able to directly influence service delivery. They said that the service had improved massively over time, and that they feel respected, valued and listened to.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: outstanding

52. Ambitious for children, senior leaders have continued to build on the strengths seen at the last inspection, securing further improvements in the quality of services. The director of children services is an inspiring role model, putting children first and supporting the workforce to do the same. Senior leaders have a deep understanding of the community they serve. Together, they have successfully created a culture of high aspiration and a relentless focus on improving children's and families' experiences. Leaders have a very clear and well-articulated vision, which is understood and embraced by the whole workforce.

53. Since the last inspection, there has been significant progress in building a permanent, diverse and well-supported workforce. The vacancy rate has fallen significantly, which is a notable achievement that leaders are rightly proud of. Workers are highly enthusiastic and positive about the organisational culture. They comment that the senior management team and frontline managers are visible and effective. These conditions provide a strong foundation to develop and sustain very effective social work practice, making a significant difference to the lives of children and young people.

54. Social workers told inspectors that morale is strong, they enjoy their roles and value the support they receive from their managers, senior leaders and their colleagues. Workers fully understand the importance of relationship-based

working, and the strengths-based model of practice is embedded throughout the service. A particular strength in Newham is the quality of engagement and direct work with children, reflected in the high quality of their assessments, plans and reviews. Children benefit greatly from consistency in their relationships with their workers and carers. This continuity of relationships means that children do not need to repeatedly tell their stories to new workers, and that they are supported by adults whom they know and trust.

55. Leaders have continued to invest in the work of the in-house clinical service. This includes training and resources for social workers, and access to qualified systemic therapists that supports practice by offering consultations, reflective sessions and joint working in more complex or challenging areas of practice.

56. Leaders have not stood still since the last inspection. They have been proactive in developing provision to address changing needs and further enhancing services for children. Services have been further strengthened, for example responses to 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, the work of the clinical team and enhanced edge of care support for children. These bespoke services are making a real difference for vulnerable children and their families.

57. Children's services are supported by strong political and corporate commitment. There is a shared determination to make life healthier, happier, safer and better for children, care leavers and families in Newham. Governance arrangements are very robust, and reporting arrangements are clear and effective. Together, the interim chief executive, lead member and the senior leadership team champion children's, families' and care leavers' needs. They are proactive in their approach, ensuring good engagement and involvement across the wider council in delivering corporate parenting responsibilities. One example is the corporate commitment to extend the reach of the council's family business model, giving more care leavers work or work experience opportunities within council services and linking local businesses to create more routes for young people into employment.

58. Leaders have a thorough and accurate understanding of the quality and impact of practice. The self-evaluation that senior leaders provided to Ofsted is an accurate reflection of what inspectors found; leaders have a detailed view of the difference services are making to the lives of children and young people.

59. Leaders have responded positively to the national social care reforms. There has been a significant focus on developing services that promote opportunities for children to remain within family networks and kinship care arrangements. This has had a significant impact, with a growing number of children able to remain within their family, where they have a sense of belonging.

60. Ensuring sufficiency of placements for children in care continues to be a challenge. Leaders have a clear and realistic picture of supply and demand. They use accurate data and analyse trends to forecast future need. Leaders recognise where gaps exist, particularly in placements for children whose circumstances are more complex. They have acted to strengthen provision and respond to changing

demand, including through investment in the council's own residential resource and increasing fostering capacity. Ongoing analysis of sufficiency need is providing leaders with a greater understanding of placement usage and demands.

61. Strategic and operational partnerships are strong and mature. The feedback received from partner agencies is positive. Leaders foster highly effective and constructive relationships across the partnership. This helps to ensure that children and families get the help and support that they need.

62. Corporate parenting responsibilities are given the highest priority across the council. Leaders, elected members and the workforce demonstrate a strong and visible commitment to the welfare of children and care leavers. The corporate parenting board has been strengthened, with young people themselves chairing meetings. As a result, the views of care leavers are represented well by the very active care leaver forum, whose members regularly attend the corporate parenting board and whose views are used effectively to shape service delivery. The lead member is determined to build on young people's participation and to make the board even more influential.

63. The local authority's quality assurance framework is clear and well developed. Senior leaders are using a wide range of quality assurance tools, including practice learning conversations, themed case reviews, peer reviews and the direct observation of practice, to rigorously interrogate practice and performance. Learning from this audit activity is widely disseminated, and opportunities such as lunchtime seminars are used effectively to support continuous improvement.

64. Newham's relationship-based model of practice, 'Circles of Support', is now fully embedded across all areas of the service. The positive culture of learning is a standout strength. Investment in the social work academy and in clinical services has greatly strengthened practice, with a high-quality training and development offer and expert coaching supporting frontline staff. This focus on development is a real strength for the organisation and a significant benefit for children and families.

65. The focus on recruitment and investment in resources within the service has helped to reduce workloads, providing more time and space for social workers to spend with children and families. Workloads are carefully monitored and, when they increase, timely action is taken to address levels of work. Social workers receive regular supervision, which is both reflective and challenging, helping them to help progress children's plans. Supervision is thorough and well recorded in children's records.

66. Finally, the words staff use about working in Newham consistently express confidence in and commitment to the organisation, and most importantly to the children and young people they work with. Staff genuinely feel valued and supported.

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