

Inspections of looked after children services

Evaluation schedule and grade descriptors

This evaluation schedule sets out the areas of looked after children services to be inspected from April 2013. The grade descriptors illustrate what outstanding, good, adequate and inadequate are in relation to the judgements made. Grade descriptors are not exhaustive, but illustrate the level of service or outcome linked to that particular grade.

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361

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Contents

Evaluation schedule for the looked after children inspection	4
Overview of summary evaluation schedule for the looked after children inspection	4
Outcomes for looked after children	7
Grade descriptors	9
Outcomes for looked after children	15

Evaluation schedule for the looked after children inspection

Overview of summary evaluation schedule for the looked after children inspection

- Overall effectiveness
- Capacity to improve
- Leadership and management taking into account:
 - ambition and prioritisation
 - performance management and quality assurance
 - workforce development
 - partnerships
 - effective use of resources
- Quality of provision taking into account:
 - service responsiveness
 - quality of assessment and direct work with children and families
 - quality of case planning, reviews and recording
- Outcomes for looked after children and young people

Overall effectiveness

1. Inspectors will consider evidence and judgements from across the evaluation schedule before arriving at the overall effectiveness judgement, taking into account the:
 - extent to which the local authority meets statutory responsibilities to looked after children and care leavers
 - extent to which the local authority, as corporate parent, is contributing to improving outcomes for looked after children and care leavers
 - extent to which the leadership and management of the local authority delivers services that provide effective use of resources.

Capacity to improve

2. The capacity to make further improvements is a judgement about the ability of the local authority and its partners to continue improving standards and

progress based on what it has accomplished so far or to maintain high standards.

3. Judgements about capacity to improve consider how looked after children services are planned and managed and the effectiveness of arrangements for delivering improvement. The basis for making this judgement includes the extent to which:
 - the local authority and its partners have a consistent track record of sustained improvement and/or are able to maintain high-quality services
 - improvements in outcomes are linked to improvements in the quality of services
 - the local authority and its partners have a clear vision, ambition and articulate appropriate priorities that will sustain improvement
 - the local authority has an accurate understanding of their key strengths and weaknesses and plans are in place to build on strengths and remedy weaknesses.

Leadership and management taking into account workforce development; partnerships and effective use of resources

4. In order to make their judgement, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:
 - the local authority and its partners provide effective and ambitious leadership to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children across all services
 - local priorities are identified and acted on so that outcomes for looked after children improve and there is ambitious and realistic target setting in relation to looked after children
 - elected members and corporate parents champion the needs of all looked after children and young people and respond proactively and effectively to their needs
 - performance management and evaluation are established across the partnership and lead to systemic and sustained improvements in outcomes for looked after children and young people
 - performance targets are met and achievement is in line with or exceeds similar areas and or nationally
 - managers exercise robust management oversight and offer focused support to staff at all levels
 - management information is used effectively to deliver continuous improvement and to sustain high-quality looked after children services that are sensitive to the diverse needs of local communities

- commissioning, including joint commissioning of looked after children services and services for children on the edge of care, is established across the local authority and its partners and is monitored effectively
- weaknesses in services and resource deficits are understood and risk assessed and the local authority can meet the requirements of the sufficiency duty
- workforce planning ensures that there are sufficient numbers of qualified and experienced social workers in place alongside other staff to deliver service priorities and to maintain high-quality looked after children services
- the workforce plan addresses staffing requirements to meet the needs of the local community and to reflect its diversity
- outcomes for looked after children and young people from minority groups are at least consistent with those of all other children and young people in the area and the attainment gap is being significantly closed
- the profile of children and young people and their parents and carers is known and used to inform service planning and delivery
- financial resources are used effectively.

Quality of provision

5. In order to make their judgements, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:
 - decisions and action are timely and ensure that children and young people who need to be looked after are in appropriate placements
 - there are clear and agreed processes for assessing risk and decision-making regarding whether a child needs to be looked after or remain in care, and these are well embedded, understood and implemented consistently across the partnership
 - assessments result in a comprehensive understanding of the needs of looked after children and routinely include the views of children and their parents/carers
 - assessment and case planning demonstrate how far the particular needs of children are taken into consideration (disability, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion and language)
 - all plans for looked after children and care leavers are comprehensive and underpinned by thorough needs assessment and analysis and are implemented, monitored and evaluated
 - plans effectively address consideration of permanent alternative placement or return home where appropriate
 - plans are regularly reviewed to ensure timely interventions and progress against outcome goals and that there is no drift in care for a looked after child

- unplanned changes of placement are avoided
- children and young people have sustained appropriate relationships with professionals who know them well and care about them
- records are up to date and support effective practice.

Outcomes for looked after children

6. In order to make their judgements, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:

- the local authority contribution to effective information-sharing contributes to ensuring consistency in meeting the health needs of looked after children and care leavers
- looked after children and care leavers have access to a comprehensive health needs assessment which they are encouraged to attend and which addresses their diverse needs (disability, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion and language)
- targeted health promotion services are in place for looked after children and care leavers
- arrangements are in place to ensure that looked after children and care leavers can achieve timely access to health services, including specialist services, when required
- looked after children placed out of authority receive healthcare that addresses their physical and emotional needs.
- risk is managed to ensure that all children and young people who need to be looked after are in care
- looked after children missing from care are safeguarded
- thorough arrangements for monitoring care placements, including those outside of the local area, have an impact on improving safeguarding outcomes for all looked after children
- all agencies are actively engaged and held to account for their responsibilities in delivering quality services to safeguard the welfare of looked after children and care leavers
- children are placed in provision judged to be adequate or better including those placed out of area
- looked after children live in stable placements which provide high-quality care and support
- looked after children and care leavers have effective support to access the best possible education to meet their particular needs and are fully included in school life

- attendance is above average and fixed-term and permanent exclusion rates are low compared to other looked after children and are comparable with rates for all children
- looked after children make good progress in relation to their starting point, underpinned by effective and up-to-date personal education plans that have been agreed with the child's full involvement; their progress at school is carefully monitored and action taken when there are concerns
- the performance gap in attainment between looked after children in the authority and the national average for all children and young people has narrowed significantly
- work to narrow the gap is effective and positively takes account of children's diverse backgrounds
- monitoring arrangements for looked after children and care leavers educated outside the area ensure that they are supported well and achieve well
- looked after children and care leavers have access to a range of leisure activities of their choice
- positive action overcomes barriers to participation
- looked after children and care leavers are supported to develop effective communication skills and speak out on issues that matter to them
- an effective and valued looked after children in care council (or equivalent) is in place
- the views of looked after children and care leavers routinely inform training and evaluation. Their involvement has led to a sustained and significant improvement in service provision
- looked after children and care leavers report a consistently high level of satisfaction with the quality of services
- feedback from looked after children and young people is analysed differentially for equality and diversity
- there is a well established complaints and representations process which is valued and used by children and young people and leads to service improvement
- children and young people are aware how to complain, encouraged and supported by an advocate where appropriate
- multi-agency action to prevent offending and re-offending is well embedded, has led to significant reductions in offending and has improved life chances for those at risk
- the performance gap between looked after children and the national average for all pupils post-16 has closed significantly or been eradicated

- care leavers receive effective support to access high-quality provision including appropriate vocational options that enables them to continue their education or training post-16 or enter employment
- care leavers have high aspirations and a high proportion are achieving well in further and higher education
- care leavers, including older care leavers, contribute routinely to their pathway plan reviews
- pathway plans including transition planning for looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities address all young people's needs including those concerning their disability, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion and language as appropriate
- care leavers are positive about the plans in place to support their transition to adulthood
- care leavers have access to a range of high-quality permanent and affordable accommodation which meets their needs.

Grade descriptors

Overall effectiveness

<p>Outstanding Grade: 1</p>	<p>Overall effectiveness is likely to be outstanding when there is a sustained history of delivering effective innovative solutions to problems which result in improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Leadership at all levels across the partnership is active, visible and effective. Performance management is comprehensive, systematic and demonstrably effective.</p> <p>There are the people, skills and capability in place for looked after children and care leavers to maintain high-quality services. All looked after children and care leavers are aware of how to complain and make representations and have easy access to advocacy services. Statutory guidelines in relation to complaints made against staff working with children are incorporated into a local policy which is implemented in full, is user-friendly and consistently followed.</p> <p>Looked after children and care leavers, and their parents and carers, are involved in all aspects of planning and intervention and have opportunities to contribute to key strategic processes. The council and its partners set ambitious targets for improving services and achieve almost all of these.</p>
<p>Good Grade: 2</p>	<p>Overall effectiveness is likely to be good when those responsible for the leadership and management of services for looked after children and care leavers have identified and secured demonstrable improvements to services which contribute to improving outcomes for children and young people.</p> <p>Leadership results in a shared vision and agreed priorities for improvement.</p> <p>Trends demonstrate sustained improvement in the quality of services.</p>

	<p>Targets for improving services are ambitious and most are met. Change is implemented effectively and delivers clear benefits to service users.</p> <p>Quality assurance and performance management systems have led to improvements in service provision.</p> <p>Workforce planning and knowledge, learning and development are effective in securing a skilled, capable and knowledgeable workforce.</p> <p>The views of looked after children and care leavers, and their parents and carers, contribute routinely to planning and evaluating the effectiveness of provision and inform service improvements.</p> <p>Partnership with stakeholders, community groups and commissioned services are effective. There is sustained satisfaction from service users with the quality of service delivery. There is effective use of resources.</p>
<p>Adequate Grade: 3</p>	<p>Overall effectiveness is likely to be adequate when statutory requirements are met. Managers have a track record of achieving some improvements in service provision. No services are deteriorating. Effective plans are in place to improve the contribution by the council and its partners to better outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Quality assurance and performance management processes are effective. The views of looked after children and care leavers contribute to evaluating the effectiveness of some provision and inform service improvements.</p> <p>Staffing resources are sufficient to deliver the service area priorities. Processes for recruitment and retention of staff are effective. Knowledge, learning and development meet the development needs of the majority staff.</p> <p>Partnerships with stakeholders, community groups and commissioned services are effective. Financial plans are in place.</p>
<p>Inadequate Grade: 4</p>	<p>The overall effectiveness judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, or if there are significant failures to comply with requirements and as a result:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the outcomes for children and young people looked after are inadequate or their welfare is not safeguarded.

Capacity to improve

<p>Outstanding</p> <p>Grade: 1</p>	<p>The capacity to improve judgement is likely to be outstanding if all the requirements for a good judgement are met and in addition:</p> <p>there are instances of highly effective practice across most areas evaluated that contribute to improved outcomes for looked after children and young people.</p>
<p>Good</p> <p>Grade: 2</p>	<p>The capacity to improve judgement is likely to be good if all the requirements for an adequate judgement are met and some of those requirements are exceeded and in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the local authority and its partners have a consistent track record of sustained improvement and/or are able to maintain high-quality services ■ the local authority and its partners have a clear vision, ambition and articulate appropriate priorities that will sustain improvement ■ workforce planning and development are effective leading to significant improvement of the effectiveness of the work force to safeguard looked after children’s welfare ■ there is effective service user engagement.
<p>Adequate</p> <p>Grade: 3</p>	<p>The capacity to improve judgement is likely to be adequate if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the local authority and its partners have a track record of improvement ■ improvements in outcomes are linked to improvements in the quality of services ■ the local authority and its partners have ambition and articulate appropriate priorities ■ planning is effective ■ workforce planning and development are effective ■ there is evidence of service-user engagement.
<p>Inadequate</p> <p>Grade: 4</p>	<p>The capacity to improve judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, or if there are significant failures to comply with requirements and as a result:</p> <p>children and young people are inadequately protected and at risk of significant harm.</p>

Leadership and management

<p>Outstanding Grade: 1</p>	<p>The leadership and management judgement is likely to be outstanding if all the requirements for a good judgement are met and in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ there are instances of highly effective practice across most areas evaluated that contribute to improved outcomes for all looked after children and young people. <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ senior officers ensure staff from across the council and its partners contribute to the planning and delivery of key priorities and to the achievement of sustainable and excellent outcomes. ■ there are instances of highly effective practice across most areas evaluated that contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people looked after ■ effective use is made of internal evaluation and external challenge to identify and address pressure points and improve looked after children services and outcomes for children and young people ■ management information is used effectively to deliver continuous improvement and to sustain high-quality looked after children services that are sensitive to the diverse needs of local communities. ■ there are instances of highly effective practice across most areas evaluated that contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people looked after. <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ outcomes for children and young people from minority groups are good overall and at least consistent with those of all other children and young people in the area and the attainment gap is being significantly closed ■ staffing and resource capacity are used effectively to respond to new demands.
<p>Good Grade: 2</p>	<p>The leadership and management judgement is likely to be good if all the requirements for an adequate judgement are met and some of those requirements are exceeded, for example, targets are ambitious as well as being realistic and in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ elected members and corporate parents champion the needs of all looked after children and young people and respond proactively and effectively to their needs ■ the local authority and its partners provide effective and ambitious leadership to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children across all services ■ local priorities are identified and acted on so that outcomes improve and there is ambitious and realistic target setting in relation to looked after children. ■ performance management and evaluation are established across the partnership and lead to improvements in outcomes

	<p>for looked after children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ senior managers exercise robust management oversight and offer focused support to staff at all levels. ■ the workforce plan reflects the diversity of the population ■ partnerships with stakeholders, relevant community groups and commissioned services have led to improvements in service design and delivery and outcomes. ■ the outcomes of complaints, including those made by children and young people about staff, and concerns raised about services are systematically used to inform service development ■ service users report a consistently high level of satisfaction with the quality of services ■ commissioning, including joint commissioning of looked after children services is effective including balance of cost and quality ■ cross-agency partnerships for looked after children and care leavers are highly effective and improve outcomes ■ the views of children and care leavers and parents and carers inform service improvement ■ children and young people are aware how to complain, are appropriately encouraged and supported by an advocate where necessary.
<p>Adequate Grade: 3</p>	<p>The leadership and management judgement is likely to be adequate if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ vision and ambition is shared and understood by most staff groups and priorities are only beginning to emerge on the basis of a clear analysis of need. ■ performance targets are met and achievement is in line with, or exceeds, similar areas and or nationally ■ performance management and evaluation arrangements are in place and lead to improvements in looked after children's outcomes. ■ the local authority and the partnership provide strong, visible leadership to looked after children and care leavers services ■ local priorities are identified and acted on so that outcomes improve and there is extensive, ambitious and realistic target setting in relation to looked after children ■ weaknesses in services and resource deficits are understood and risk assessed and appropriate action taken ■ workforce planning ensures that there are sufficient numbers of qualified and experienced social workers in place alongside other staff to meet statutory requirements and deliver service priorities ■ productive partnerships with key stakeholders are established ■ there is a well established complaints and representations process which is valued by children and young people ■ statutory guidelines in relation to complaints made against staff

	<p>working with children are consistently followed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the workforce plan addresses staffing requirements to meet the needs of the local community ■ the profile of children and young people, and their parents and carers, is known and used to inform service planning and delivery ■ resource deficits are understood and risk assessed and are consistent with the sufficiency duty ■ user feedback is analysed differentially for equality and diversity.
<p>Inadequate Grade: 4</p>	<p>The leadership and management judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, or if there are significant failures to comply with requirements and as a result:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the outcomes for children and young people looked after are inadequate or their welfare is not safeguarded.

Quality of provision

<p>Outstanding Grade: 1</p>	<p>The quality of provision judgement is likely to be outstanding if all the requirements for a good judgement are met and in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ there are instances of highly effective practice across most areas evaluated that contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people looked after. <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ clear and agreed processes for assessing risk and decision-making regarding whether a child needs to be admitted to, and remain in, care are in place and these are well embedded, understood and implemented consistently across the partnership ■ all plans for looked after children and care leavers are comprehensive and underpinned by thorough needs assessment and analysis and are implemented, monitored and evaluated ■ planning ensures that there is no drift in care for a looked after child ■ all decisions and actions are recorded ■ decisions and actions are timely and ensure that children and young people who need to be looked after are accommodated appropriately ■ support to those on the edge of care results in good decisions to only look after those with needs that can be best met through care provision ■ plans are regularly reviewed to ensure timely interventions and progress against outcome goals.
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<p>Good Grade: 2</p>	<p>The quality of provision judgement is likely to be good if all the requirements for an adequate judgement are met and some of those requirements are exceeded and in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ children and young people have sustained relationships with professionals who know them well and care about them ■ records support high-quality practice ■ children and young people, and their parents and carers, report that their needs are understood in the context of their culture, religion and identity.
<p>Adequate Grade: 3</p>	<p>The quality of provision judgement is likely to be adequate if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the changing needs of looked after children and care leavers are routinely monitored to ensure that the services provided meet these needs effectively ■ assessments result in a comprehensive understanding of the needs of looked after children and routinely include the views of children and their parents/carers ■ plans effectively address consideration of permanent alternative placement or return home where appropriate ■ unplanned changes of placement are avoided ■ records are up to date ■ children and young people, and their parents and carers, report that they are treated with dignity and respect ■ social workers effectively support children and young people to move to their new homes and where they are moving outside the 'home' authority, arrangements are secure in respect of immediate access to health and education provision that meet their needs and for notification to the 'receiving' authority.
<p>Inadequate Grade: 4</p>	<p>The quality of provision judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, or if there are significant failures to comply with requirements and as a result:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the outcomes for children and young people looked after are inadequate or their welfare is not safeguarded.

Outcomes for looked after children

<p>Outstanding Grade: 1</p>	<p>The outcome judgement is likely to be outstanding if all the requirements for a good judgement are met and in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ there are instances of highly effective practice which may include examples of innovative practice across most areas evaluated that contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people looked after. <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ arrangements are in place to ensure that looked after children and
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	<p>care leavers can achieve timely access to health services, including specialist services, when required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ there is sufficient choice to meet local need, with regulatory inspections showing good and outstanding provision ■ thorough arrangements for monitoring care placements, including those outside of the local area, have an impact on improving safeguarding outcomes for all looked after children ■ looked after children and care leavers have good support to access the best possible education to meet their particular needs and are fully included in school life ■ partners have very high aspirations for looked after children and care leavers ■ looked after children and care leavers have access to good leisure activities of their choice ■ promoting access to leisure and recreation is high priority ■ positive action overcomes barriers to participation ■ work to narrow the gap is effective and positively takes account of children's diverse backgrounds ■ the views of looked after children and care leavers routinely inform quality assurance, training and evaluation. Their involvement has led to a sustained and significant improvement in service provision ■ multi-agency action to prevent offending and re-offending is well embedded, has led to significant reductions and improved life chances for those at risk ■ the performance gap between looked after children and the national average for all pupils post-16 has closed significantly or been eradicated ■ care leavers have high aspirations and a high proportion are achieving well in further and higher education.
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<p>Good Grade: 2</p>	<p>The outcome judgement is likely to be good if all the requirements for an adequate judgement are met and some of those requirements are exceeded and in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the local authority contributes to effective information-sharing across agencies and ensures consistency in meeting the health needs of looked after children and care leavers ■ risk is managed to ensure that all children and young people who need to be in care are in care ■ Children and young people looked after are safe and develop an understanding of how to keep themselves safe and where relevant any risks associated with bullying, going missing or sexual exploitation are ceasing or at least reducing ■ all agencies are actively engaged and held to account for their responsibilities in delivering quality services ■ attendance is above average and fixed-term and permanent exclusion rates are low compared to other looked after children and are comparable with rates for all children ■ looked after children make good progress in relation to their starting point, underpinned by effective and up-to-date personal education plans that have been agreed with the child's full involvement ■ looked after children and care leavers' achievement is above that of similar areas ■ the performance gap in attainment between looked after children and the national average for all children and young people has narrowed significantly ■ monitoring arrangements for looked after children and care leavers educated outside the area ensure that they are supported well and achieve well ■ looked after children and care leavers report their needs are met well and the support they receive improves social and emotional well-being, including at key transition points ■ pathway plans are of high quality and comprehensive; transition planning for looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receiving services is thorough, timely and regularly evaluated to ensure smooth transition to adult services and further education, employment or training ■ outcomes for economic well-being are above those in similar areas ■ care leavers receive effective support to access high-quality provision that enables them to continue their education or training post-16 ■ care leavers have access to a range of high-quality permanent and affordable accommodation which meets their needs.
<p>Adequate Grade: 3</p>	<p>The outcome judgement is likely to be adequate if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ looked after children and care leavers have access to a comprehensive health needs assessment which they are encouraged to attend which address their diverse needs (disability,

	<p>culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion and language)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ clear and effective systems are in place to ensure that looked after children placed out of authority receive healthcare that addresses their physical and emotional needs ■ arrangements for monitoring care placements have an impact on improving safeguarding outcomes for looked after children ■ information, support and guidance are targeted to needs ■ looked after children live in stable placements which provide high-quality care and support ■ the progress made by looked after children and care leavers is regularly monitored and individual targets set ■ looked after children and care leavers achieve at least in line with those in similar authorities and make adequate or better progress in line with their starting points ■ looked after children enjoy stable education, particularly during examination time ■ all looked after children have an up-to-date personal education plan that is regularly monitored ■ support and monitoring arrangements for children educated outside the area are in place ■ looked after children who are excluded have timely access to full-time education or receive full-time alternative learning and/or vocational programmes that meet their needs ■ looked after children benefit from out-of-hours learning opportunities. ■ looked after children and care leavers are supported to develop effective communication skills and speak out on issues that matter to them ■ a strong and active looked after children local authority (or equivalent) has developed a pledge for children in care and actively monitors its progress and relevance ■ looked after children and care leavers are supported and encouraged to be involved with activities such as recruiting staff ■ the 14–19 curriculum for care leavers offers a wide range of well-matched vocational options ■ care leavers, including older care leavers, contribute routinely to their pathway plan reviews ■ care leavers are positive about the plans in place to support their transition to adulthood ■ pathway plans take into account needs arising from disability, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion and language as appropriate.
<p>Inadequate Grade: 4</p>	<p>The outcome judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, or if there are significant failures to comply with requirements and as a result:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the outcomes for children and young people looked after are inadequate or their welfare is not safeguarded.

