

<i>item:</i>	7
<i>report:</i>	CYP05/10

HMIe'S RESUME OF CHILD PROTECTION INSPECTIONS IN SCOTLAND by Jon King

Summary

This report updates the Committee on the outcomes of the first cycle of national child protection inspections, undertaken by HMIe Services for Children.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 HMIe published the report: *How well do we protect Scotland's children? A report on the findings of the joint inspections of services to protect children 2005-2009* in November 2009. It is available at: <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/hwpsc.html>
- 1.2 This report draws together the main messages from multidisciplinary inspections of child protection services. Overall, around a quarter of the inspections showed serious weaknesses in aspects of child protection which would increase the risk of harm to children. In those areas the inspection process acted as a significant catalyst for change. Inspection was followed by prompt action to reduce the level of risk. Services across Scotland have substantial strengths in protecting children, but there are areas of weakness which need to be addressed to improve provision to protect children and meet their needs. The report has identified a range of challenges which need to be addressed in order to ensure the day-to-day experiences of all vulnerable children improve and help them build a more positive future. These cover: assessment of risks and needs, planning to keep individual children safe and improve their circumstances, meeting longer-term needs, Information-sharing and recording, seeking the views of children and families, quality assurance and self-evaluation for improvement and leadership and direction.

2. How well do we protect Scotland's children?

- 2.1 HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) was given the responsibility of leading this programme of multi-agency inspections, in partnership with other scrutiny bodies, including the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA), the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care (Care Commission), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), the NHS Quality Improvement Scotland (NHS QIS) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIP). This was the first example of fully joined up inspection processes in children's services, and seen as the prelude to the inspection of integrated services.

- 2.2 These inspections both complemented and reinforced other aspects of the child protection reform programme.
- 2.3 A strategic group involving representatives from these scrutiny bodies was established and extended to include representatives from Audit Scotland and the Scottish Executive. A reference group involving representatives from the services delivering child protection complemented the work of the strategic group. Services in two local authority areas, Highland and East Dunbartonshire, volunteered to work in partnership with the inspection team in pilot inspections.
- 2.4 Between May 2006 and March 2009, inspections took place in each of the remaining 30 local authority areas. Both pilot areas were revisited during that period as part of the follow-through inspection programme.
- 2.5 The scope of the inspection was broad, covering three levels of service: the strategic level of leadership and planning; the delivery level of systems and processes; and the outcomes for children and their families, including the experience of the service users.
- 2.6 Follow-through inspections assessed the extent to which services continued to improve the quality of their work to protect children. In follow-through inspections, inspectors revisited the council area to evaluate progress made in responding to the main points for action identified in the initial report.

3. Findings

- 3.1 Scotland has substantial strengths in protecting children. The critical gradings across 30 authorities are shown below. The data does not include Highland and East Dunbartonshire as they were pilot inspections.

Quality Indicator	Number						Percentage					
	E	VG	G	S	W	U	E	VG	G	S	W	U
1.1 Children are listened to, understood and respected	1	11	10	7	1	0	3	37	33	23	3	0
1.2 Children benefit from strategies to minimise harm	0	12	11	6	1	0	0	40	37	20	3	0
1.3 Children are helped by the actions taken in response to immediate concerns	0	8	11	4	3	4	0	27	37	13	10	13
1.4 Children's needs are met	0	3	11	9	6	1	0	10	37	30	20	3

2.1 Public awareness of the safety and protection of children	0	16	6	7	1	0	0	53	20	2 3	3	0
3.1 Involving children and their families in key processes	0	8	11	6	5	0	0	27	37	20	17	0
3.2 Information-sharing and recording	0	2	17	5	5	1	0	7	57	17	17	3
	E	VG	G	S	W	U	E	VG	G	S	W	U
3.3 Recognising and assessing risks and needs	0	0	6	11	11	2	0	0	20	37	37	7
3.4 Effectiveness of planning to meet needs	0	3	10	7	7	3	0	10	33	23	23	10
4.1 Policies and procedures	0	6	16	5	3	0	0	20	53	17	10	0
4.2 Operational planning	1	5	7	8	9	0	3	17	23	27	30	0
4.3 Participation of children, families and other relevant people in policy development	1	8	9	6	5	1	3	27	30	20	17	3
4.4 Recruitment and retention of staff	0	11	10	7	2	0	0	37	33	23	7	0
4.5 Development of staff	1	9	13	4	3	0	3	30	43	13	10	0
5.1 Vision values and aims	6	7	8	6	3	0	20	23	27	20	10	0
5.2 Leadership and direction	2	5	8	8	6	1	7	17	27	27	20	3
5.3 Leadership of people and partnerships	0	11	9	7	3	0	0	37	30	23	10	0
5.4 Leadership of change and improvement	0	5	7	11	7	0	0	17	23	37	23	0

The gradings are: E – Excellent; VG - Very good; G – Good; S – Satisfactory; W – Weak; U - Unsatisfactory

- 3.2 Most Chief Officers are clear about their accountability for child protection. Across the country there is a wide range of support services to help children and families at an early stage.
- 3.3 Staff have access to a range of policies and procedures linked to vision, values and aims which help them in their child protection work. Effective training provision in most areas has increased staff confidence and competence. The workforce is increasingly alert to signs that children may need help and generally act promptly and appropriately when concerns arise.
- 3.4 Staff communicate effectively with children and families and establish trusting relationships. Services have taken positive and effective steps to promote public awareness of child protection. These strengths provide a useful platform on which to build to provide greater consistency across the country in meeting the needs of children who may be at risk of abuse and neglect.

- 3.5 The HMIE report also however, identified a range of challenges to ensure the day-to-day experiences of all vulnerable children improve and help them build a more positive future.

Assessment of risks and needs

Staff across services recognise when children need help and in most cases, act effectively to respond to immediate concerns. However, there are important weaknesses in the quality and rigour of assessment of risks and needs. Assessment is an ongoing process not a one-off event and should address children's longer-term needs as well as their immediate safety. Effective assessments need to be informed by all relevant information.

Planning to keep individual children safe and improve their circumstances

Across the country, staff meet regularly to plan together for children who may be in need of protection. Most children at risk have an allocated social worker and a child protection plan, but too often plans are vague and do not specify what needs to change in order to reduce risks. More rigorous planning is required to ensure support continues after children's names are removed from the CPR, so that improvements continue.

Meeting longer-term needs

Overall, the short-term needs of vulnerable children are usually met well. However, some children who have suffered abuse and neglect do not get the additional help they need to recover from their experiences and build more positive futures.

Information-sharing and recording

Most staff have guidance and support to help them decide how and when to share information to protect children. In many areas, effective information-sharing is supported by positive working relationships between staff across services. However, some staff are not included when they may have important information to share about a child's circumstances that would help meet children's needs better.

Seeking the views of children and families

Most services involve parents in meetings where important decisions are made about their children, such as case conferences, reviews and core groups. Practice in seeking children's views and involving them in decision-making is at an early stage of development across the country. Service planning now needs to take greater account of the views of children and families about the effectiveness of the help they have received.

Quality assurance and self-evaluation for improvement

Most services have carried out some structured evaluation of their work to protect children, but in many areas, joint self-evaluation is still in the early stages of development. Quality assurance and open and rigorous self-evaluation now need to become more firmly embedded in practice. They require a clearer focus on impact on, and outcomes for, vulnerable children and families.

Leadership and direction

Chief Officers and senior managers are clear about their individual and collective responsibilities for child protection. Where there is effective leadership and direction, outcomes for vulnerable children and families are improved. Chief Officers should continue to demonstrate their commitment to child protection and partnership working, and be accountable for the effectiveness of the services their staff provide.

2. Next steps

In February 2009, Ministers requested that HMIE lead and coordinate a further, more proportionate programme of child protection inspections from April 2009. This programme will conclude in 2012. Acknowledging both the Crerar recommendations and the Government response, HMIE state that the revised model of child protection inspections places self-evaluation at the centre of the inspection process.

Recommendations

The Joint Committee is invited to consider the issues raised by this report.

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