

Services for children and young people in Midlothian

13 January 2014

Report of a joint inspection

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1. Introduction

At the request of Scottish Ministers, the Care Inspectorate is leading joint inspections of services for children and young people across Scotland. When we say children and young people in this report we mean people under the age of 18 years or up to 21 years if they have been looked after.

These inspections will look at the difference services are making to the lives of children, young people and families. They take account of the full range of work within a community planning partnership area including services provided by health visitors, school nurses, teachers, doctors, social workers, police officers, and the voluntary sector.

The inspection teams are made up of inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland.

A draft framework of quality indicators was published by the Care Inspectorate in October 2012. The indicators in 'How well are we improving the lives of children, young people and families? A guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators' were used by the team of inspectors in their independent evaluation of the quality of services. We have covered all of the quality indicators in this report and reached evaluations for nine of them which are set out in the table in Appendix 1.

2. Background

The joint inspection of services for children and young people in the Midlothian Community Planning Partnership area took place over three weeks in June and August 2013. It covered the range of services in the area that had a role in providing services to benefit children, young people and families.

Inspectors reviewed documents and spoke to staff with leadership and management responsibilities. They talked to staff who work directly with children, young people and families and observed some meetings. Inspectors reviewed practice through reading a sample of records held by services who work with children and young people. Some of these children, young people and families met with and talked to inspectors. Inspectors are very grateful to all of the people who talked to us as part of this inspection.

As the findings in this joint inspection are based on a sample of children and young people inspectors cannot assure the quality of service received by every single child in the area.

3. The Community Planning Partnership area and the context for services for children and young people

Midlothian has a population of 84,240 and it is the second smallest Scottish council by area. 18.9% of the population is under 16 years which is slightly higher than for Scotland as a whole. The number of children under the age of 16 is projected to rise by 3% by 2020 which is less than the projected rise for Scotland as a whole of 5%.



Population of Midlothian

84,240



Predicted population increase of children under 16:

3% by 2020

The Midlothian Community Planning Partnership brings together members from the public, voluntary, private and community sectors. Its purpose is to develop strategic plans to deliver better services and improve the quality of life for people living in Midlothian. The partnership has pulled together community and Council plans into the Single Midlothian Plan which includes the **Single Outcome Agreement** for the area. **'Getting it right for every child'** is one of five themes within the Single Midlothian Plan. The Getting it Right for Every Midlothian Child Board brings together all relevant services to work towards improving outcomes for children, young people and families. They have developed an **Integrated Children's Services Plan** to take this work forward.

A Single Outcome Agreement is an agreement between the Scottish Government and community planning partnerships which sets out how they will work towards improving outcomes for Scotland's people in a way that reflects local circumstances and priorities.

'Getting it right for every child' is the Scottish Government's approach to making sure that all children and young people get the help they need when they need it. For more information, search "GIRFEC" online.

The Integrated Children's Services Plan is for services which work with children and young people in Midlothian. It sets out the priorities for achieving the vision for all children and young people and what services need to do together to achieve them.

4. Particular strengths that are making a difference to children, young people and families

- Meaningful involvement of children and young people to shape policies and services.
- Creative approaches to encourage, physical, social and emotional wellbeing.
- Highly effective and helpful support to improve parenting.

5. Examples of good practice

Midlothian churches and children's services working together

This is an innovative partnership which provides a wide range of very effective practical support to children and families. The needs of families who require immediate assistance are met promptly and without fuss. Money management courses and debt counselling are helping many families gain control over their finances. Volunteers work closely alongside families to build their confidence and resilience.

Sure Start, parenting and family support

The Midlothian Parenting and Family Support Strategy has been developed by Midlothian Council, Midlothian Sure Start and Midlothian Community Health Partnership. A range of successful parenting programmes is offered to all parents who want it. Large numbers of parents have taken part and are now more skilled and confident in meeting their children's needs.

6. How well are the lives of children and young people improving?

Staff are very committed to providing the right support to children, young people and families at an early stage. Vulnerable pregnant women are being identified earlier and are better prepared to meet the needs of their babies through helpful advice and support. Young babies who need additional support are now identified sooner. Services have made a very positive start to identifying children and young people who have a caring responsibility. Generally, families who are experiencing difficulties are recognised quickly and provided with the help they need to prevent difficulties getting worse. In most instances, services share relevant information to assist families to get the help they need. Improvements to the sharing of information between police and staff in education services is helping schools to respond more appropriately to children and young people, particularly those affected by domestic abuse.

Parents in Midlothian are benefiting from a range of effective parenting programmes. These are well-attended and provide parents with the confidence and skill to enhance their children's health and wellbeing. Generally, children and their families who are able to access early years services are benefiting from high quality services which have a very positive impact on their wellbeing. Early intervention services and Sure Start services are providing very effective support to families. However, not all families get the support they need at an early enough stage. The intensity and range of the support is sometimes insufficient and some services have waiting lists.

Children and young people are benefiting from very positive trusting, nurturing relationships with staff across services. Staff in schools show great respect for, and understanding of, young carers. However, schools could do more to improve the ways in which they get to know their young carers and provide appropriate support.

Children who are in need of protection from abuse are kept safe and experience positive improvements as a result of the help they receive. When children are unable to stay with their families, appropriate alternative homes are found for them to keep them safe. However, the wellbeing of some vulnerable children is not improving enough. This is mainly due to parents who do not cooperate with the help being offered to the family. There is scope to improve communication and build stronger relationships with these families. Schools are helping children to acquire the skills they need to keep themselves safe in a wide range of circumstances. More needs to be done to address the concerns of some young people about bullying in their schools and in communities.

The health of more vulnerable children is improving due to earlier identification of their needs and the provision of appropriate health services such as dentists and speech and language therapy. **Midlothian Young People's Advice Service** contributes to the improved health and wellbeing of young people by providing help with sexual health, drug and alcohol use.

Midlothian Young People's Advice Service aims to improve the health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25 years. It provides help and advice in relation to sexual health and drugs and alcohol.

Overall, the achievement of children and young people is promoted very effectively. Achievements are recognised and celebrated and very many children are successfully obtaining awards for their efforts through for example the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. There is a strong proactive emphasis on improving literacy. Schools are developing a partnership with colleges to help young people leaving school to move on to employment, further education or training. There is, however, much more work still to be done to make sure all young people move on successfully from school to further training and education or a job.

Local people are involved meaningfully in the development of new school buildings into 'community hubs' of leisure and social activities which are open to all. Children, young people and parents are actively involved in the design and delivery of local services. Parents who have themselves benefited from parenting programmes are now leading groups for other parents. Parents and carers of children with disabilities would benefit from more inclusive community leisure services.

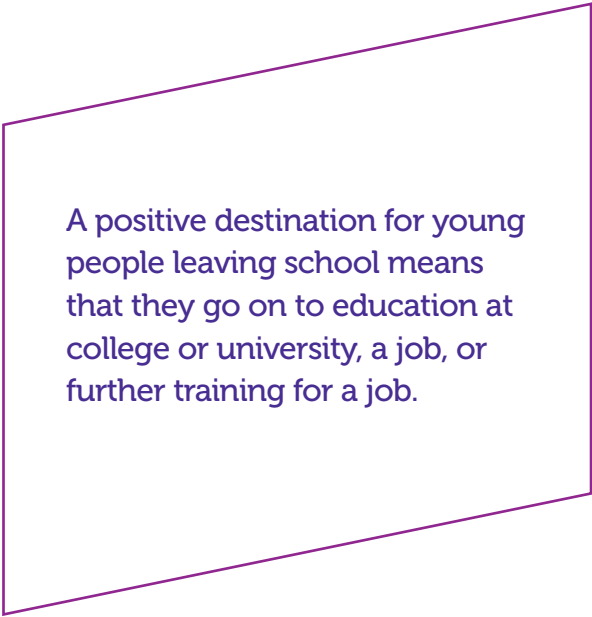
7. How well are services working together to improve the lives of children, young people and families?

The recently revised Single Midlothian Plan has given a stronger focus to providing services which better meet a wide range of needs. A number of service reviews are underway to help achieve this. Partners are now concentrating on delivering services in line with this new plan. Implementation is still at an early stage and the full impact has yet to be seen. The arrangements to monitor progress against the previous plan are not helpful in measuring the difference it has made. Manageable measures of success have now been identified along with clear lines of accountability for making progress against the new plan. Partners should ensure they take account of changing needs while sustaining the overall direction. Overall, the Midlothian Child Protection Committee is effective in taking forward the work to protect children and young people in Midlothian.

The committee now needs to evaluate the impact of its improvement plans more systematically.

The Community Planning Partnership successfully involves children, young people and families in policy, planning and service development. Very many young people take part confidently in the shaping of policy and developing services. There are successful efforts to ensure that the young people participating in this accurately represent all the different groups of children and young people. There is effective communication and consultation with families. For example, parents have been consulted about the effectiveness of the early intervention strategy and were encouraged to contribute to its development.


Sound partnership working is resulting in improved life chances for children, young people and families. For example, partners such as the Council, Queen Margaret University, and Edinburgh College are helping to create new and improved **positive destinations** for young people leaving school. Services have committed finance, staff and resources to improve the quality of services to protect children and recent child protection figures show steady improvement. A range of services are commissioned in line with strategic priorities but this could be improved further through more comprehensive joint commissioning arrangements.



A positive destination for young people leaving school means that they go on to education at college or university, a job, or further training for a job.

Staff have suitable guidance to direct and support them in most aspects of their work. Materials and tools to support the implementation of 'Getting it right for every child' have been helpfully reviewed and updated. Overall, staff understand the roles and responsibilities of the lead professional and named person. Managers have identified the need for additional guidance to support staff in their work as named persons for children and young people. Managers are setting high standards and ensuring staff know what is expected of them. They carry out regular checks on the quality of work. However, practice in some key areas is variable and there is scope to improve the effectiveness of quality assurance processes.

Staff across services, including those who work out of office hours, are alert to signs that a child may be at risk of abuse and harm. They take immediate and effective action to protect children and young people and keep them safe. Improved **frameworks to assess risks and needs** have been helpful in improving the quality and consistency of assessments. Almost all assessments of risks and needs are of an acceptable quality. Almost all children who need a multi-agency plan to direct staff in their work do have one. The majority of the children's plans are helpful in setting out what needs to be done to reduce risks and meet needs. There is a helpful focus on planning to help young people move on positively into adulthood. Some children's plans do not provide enough detail and are not clear enough about what needs to be done to meet the needs of the child or young person. Children's plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that staff are working to the agreed actions. Children, young people and parents contribute effectively to plans and take part in decisions that affect them. More could now be done to ascertain the views of very young children or those with communication difficulties. Some children, young people and parents benefit from helpful independent support. Advocacy could be offered more routinely to all those who could benefit.



A framework to assess risks and needs is an orderly way of exploring, understanding and recording what is happening in children's lives.

All staff working directly with children and young people have been trained in the 'Getting it right for every child' approach and are employing a much stronger focus on wellbeing in their work. Staff are committed and motivated to achieving the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families and work together well to provide help to children and families. They understand their roles and responsibilities and feel valued by their managers. Many are involved meaningfully in developing new and improved ways of working and benefit from regular opportunities to share learning. Some staff are feeling uncertain about the future as plans to reach a shared services agreement with East Lothian partners have been withdrawn in favour of a partnership approach.

8. How well do services lead and improve the quality of work to achieve better outcomes for children and families?

Leaders are committed to working together to improve the lives of children, particularly vulnerable children. The Single Midlothian Plan, as the new overarching plan directing the work of the community planning partners, now incorporates the Integrated Children's Services Plan. Leaders have very recently developed a coherent strategy and set a clear direction for integrating services for children and young people. More could now be done to achieve a better balance between prevention, early intervention and specialist services. Improved systems are now in place for monitoring progress and the effectiveness of the strategy for children and young people. Over time, this should assist partners to become more self-aware and confident about how well they are improving the lives of children, young people and families.

Leaders have involved staff in developing a vision for children and young people, and as a result, staff own and articulate it clearly. Staff are aware of strategic priorities and how their work fits into that vision. Leaders are working together closely in partnership and there is a very strong commitment to working alongside communities to realise a shared vision for the future. Senior managers are visible leaders who engage regularly with front line staff. Committed and enthusiastic senior managers have successfully encouraged staff to embrace new ways of working to improve the lives of children and young people.

Partners have made important improvements to services for vulnerable children over the past two years. This includes the introduction of a method of measuring readiness to learn in primary one pupils and improving the format for individual children's plans. Many promising developments are still at a very early stage and the capacity to manage and sustain improvement has yet to be demonstrated. Staff at all levels take part in and understand their role in improving the quality of their work. However, self evaluation is not sufficiently systematic and the extent to which different services use this to improve their work is variable.

Community planning partners are committed to improving children and young people's wellbeing over time. They have developed a set of indicators set out in the Single Outcome Agreement and will report annually on the progress they are making. Overall, there is an improving picture. There is a steady downward trend in the numbers of looked after children. Newborn babies are assisted to get a better start in life through earlier antenatal booking and support for vulnerable pregnant women. However, some key indicators are not improving. Breastfeeding rates are reducing. There is scope to further improve the educational attainment of looked after children. Community planning partners are aware of poorer performance and negative trends. They are attempting to understand the underlying reasons and putting in place measures to overturn them. In particular, close attention is

being paid to child protection statistics and positive destinations for school leavers and this is resulting in year on year improvements in performance. Over time these measures should improve the prospects for all children to have the best start in life and enhance the life chances of the most vulnerable children and young people.

9. Conclusion and areas for improvement

There is a high degree of commitment at all levels to improving the lives of children young people and families. Services are having a largely positive impact on children, young people and families in Midlothian. Leaders have made significant improvements to services for children, young people and families who are vulnerable and whose wellbeing is at risk. Very many families are benefiting from a wide range of approaches to strengthen their parenting skills and increase their confidence. This could be more successful if it was available to families promptly and at an earlier stage. Managers have skilfully enabled staff to embrace new ways of working through a 'Getting it right for every child' approach. A promising start has been made to involve staff at all levels in jointly reviewing the quality of their services. Partners now need to take a more systematic approach to joint self-evaluation to improve their understanding of strengths and where further improvement is needed.

Inspectors are confident that services will be able to make the necessary improvements in the light of the inspection findings. In doing so, the Midlothian Community Planning Partnership and the Getting it Right for Every Midlothian Child Board should take account of the need to:

- provide readily available support for all children, young people and families to ensure they get the help they need at the right time
- continue to improve the quality of assessment and planning for all children and young people
- implement a comprehensive and effective joint commissioning strategy for services for children and young people
- maintain strong leadership and clear direction for integration and continuous improvement in order to realise the vision and aspirations for children and young people.

10. What happens next?

The Care Inspectorate will ask the Midlothian Community Planning Partnership to publish a joint action plan detailing how it intends to make any improvements identified as a result of the inspection.

The Care Inspectorate and other bodies taking part in this inspection will monitor progress and continue to offer support for improvement through their linking arrangements.

Katie Lamb
Inspection Lead
January 2014

Appendix 1: Indicators of quality

Quality indicators help services and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved. In this inspection we used a draft framework of quality indicators that was published by the Care Inspectorate in October 2012: 'How well are we improving the lives of children, young people and families? A guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators'. This document is available on the Care Inspectorate website.

Here are the evaluations for eight of the quality indicators.

How well are the lives of children and young people improving?	
Providing help and support at an early stage	Good
Impact on children and young people	Good
Impact on families	Good
Assessing and responding to risks and needs	Adequate
Planning for individual children	Adequate
How well are services working together to improve the lives of children, young people and families?	
Planning and improving services	Adequate
Participation of children, young people, families and other stakeholders	Very good
How good is the leadership and direction of services for children and young people?	
Leadership of improvement and change	Adequate
Improving the wellbeing of children and young people	Adequate

This report uses the following word scale to make clear the judgements made by inspectors.

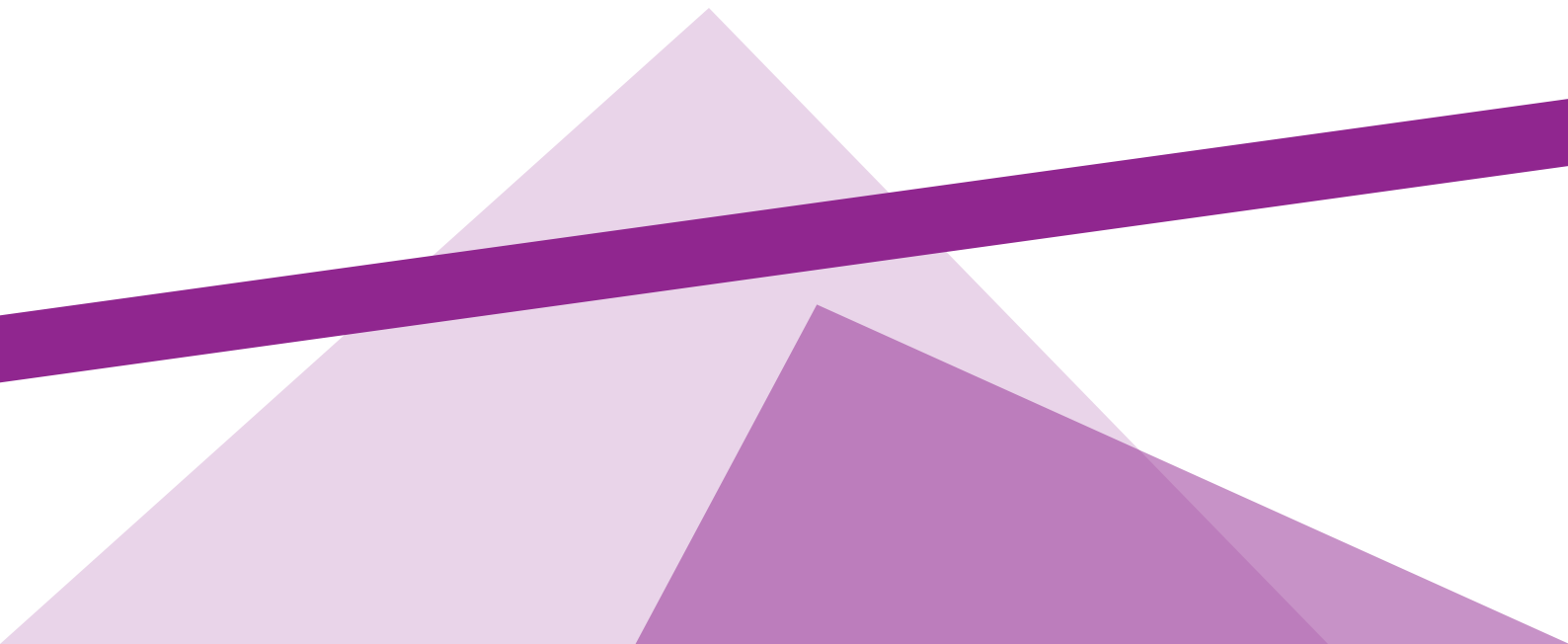
Excellent	outstanding, sector leading
Very good	major strengths
Good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
Adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Weak	important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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