

**23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2021**

I am pleased to report the following :

- All our schools are all open, following the Summer break.
- Attendance levels, although low by normal standards, are a point higher than the percentage attendance reported by schools completing the return nationally;
- Pupils with a social worker, with an EHCP and / or entitled to free school meals are all attending at a higher level than nationally.
- Outbreaks of Covid at the moment are being appropriately contained; and there are no requirements for children to isolate, as was the case in the past.
- Nearly all pupils with EHCPs have been placed at a school, although it much be noted that we have insufficient specialist places to meet demand.
- We have launched a new web-based weekly update for school leaders, called 'HeadWest 'this will help with our wish to have a great deal more engagement with Head teachers locally and ensure we have good future engagement. – see [HeadWest - \(tfemagazine.co.uk\)](http://tfemagazine.co.uk);
- Preparations for roll out of vaccinations for 12-15year has had approval by Chief medical advisers, we have been working with PH and schools to make sure things are in place for this to happen, ahead of he approval.

## **OFSTED CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE MONITORING VISIT JULY 2021**

### **1. Background to the Visit**

1.1 Between 13<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> July 2021 Ofsted undertook a monitoring visit of Children's Social Care, with a focus on children who are the subject of child in need and child protection plans. The visit looked at the quality and progress of social work delivered by Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) on behalf of the councils, and the impact this has for children who are the subject of child in need and child protection plans.

1.2 This was the fourth visit Ofsted have made since the inspection in June 2019 which found children's social care in Northamptonshire to be inadequate, as part of Ofsted's inspection framework. Ofsted are due to carry out between 4- 6 monitoring visits before completing a full inspection.

1.3 The previous visits were:

- **January 2020-** Focus on progress made in relation to the local authority's arrangements for the 'Front door' (contacts, referrals, assessments and planning for children in need of help, protection and support)
- **October 2020-** Focus on how social care has delivered child- centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **February 2021-** Focus on progress made to improve the experiences of children in care, including disabled children. This was the first visit since the establishment of Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

1.4 This was therefore the first visit by Ofsted since the two unitary councils have been established. Ofsted chose to undertake two concurrent visits with two inspection teams and will take learning from this for future visits and inspections.

1.5 Two letters were published one for each Council.

1.6 We expect that there will be at least one further monitoring visit, in October/ November 2021, followed by a full inspection in Summer 2022. The full visit will result in a grading being given by Ofsted.

## 2. The Visit

2.1 The focus was on children who are the subject of child in need and child protection plans, and inspectors looked at:

- The quality of assessments, planning and reviews;
- The quality of visits and work with children to inform assessments and plans;
- Responding to children at risk of sustained neglect;
- The quality of management oversight and supervision to progress plans;
- The stability and sustainability of the safeguarding service workforce, including impact of current caseloads on practice; and
- The impact of leaders on practice with children and families

2.2 During the visit, the inspectors

- Spoke to political leaders, senior leaders, partners;
- Reviewed North, West and County data about the children we are/ have been working with;
- Reviewed all our documents and evidence, including the refresh of our self-evaluation focused on children who are the subject of a child in need and child protection plan;
- Reviewed 12 cases NCT managers had previously audited;
- Met with social workers and spoke to Child Protection Chairs, parents and young people
- Met with managers to review children's cases that are proceeding to court, where a ruling would be made as to whether the children would come into care;
- Sampled case records of children who are or who have been the subject of a child in need or child protection plan, including children with disabilities.

## 3. Initial feedback

3.1 Inspectors reported that they could see **tangible progress, which is gaining traction in improving outcomes for children**. They agreed with our self-assessment and said we know ourselves well. They said they were impressed by senior leaders' energy and commitment to children.

3.2 The Inspectors found NCT's **quality assurance activity to be thorough and comprehensive** and commented on the oversight that senior leaders have has

been strengthened through the introduction of the QA Board chaired by the NCT Chief Executive.

3.3 The inspectors recognised that we know that we still have a way to go to have a stable workforce and that some caseloads are higher than we would want them to be as a result. They recognised that there has been a lot of effort in relation to **recruitment and retention of social workers** and some progress has been made.

3.4 The inspectors said all the **social workers they met with were passionate** about their work and felt well supported by their managers and found senior managers to be accessible and visible.

3.5 The parents and young people who the inspectors spoke to were very positive about the support they had received from their social workers and the impact this has had. For example,

*“My Social Worker has helped me to achieve change and to keep safe and has had a positive impact on my relationship with my mum”*

*“My Social Worker was really good, supportive and nice, understood my circumstances. Helped guide me and stuck by me, I found the meetings helpful and professionals celebrated successes which is different to my previous experience. The child in need plan has ended which I am happy with but I will miss my Social Worker and am confident to ask for help if need to”.*

3.6 The inspectors could see that **social work practice has improved, whilst the quality is still variable**. They saw some examples of great practice that has made a positive impact on outcomes for children.

3.7 The inspectors identified the same **areas for development** that we have already identified and have plans in place to address: **improving the consistency of quality of practice** including in analytical assessments, realistic plans, purposeful visits, understanding and reflecting children’s individual and diversity needs, and supervision of social workers that impacts on experiences and outcomes for children.

3.8 The inspectors did not identify any noticeable differences in approach, practice or outcomes between the West and the North.

#### 4. Next steps

**9<sup>th</sup> September 2021:** Final letters were published on [Ofsted - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

**October/ November 2021:** Expected 5<sup>th</sup> monitoring visit by Ofsted

**Summer 2022:** Expected full inspection which will result in gradings of children’s social care for North and West Northamptonshire Councils

**Councillor Fiona Baker**  
**Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education**