

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 05 March 2024

By: Director of Children’s Services

Title: Inspection of East Sussex local authority children’s services

Purpose: This report sets out the outcome of the Council’s Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services in December 2023

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) **Welcome the findings of the inspection of the work of ESCC for children and young people which was published on 6 February 2024; and**
 - 2) **To note the action plan which is being developed to address the areas for improvement.**
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1 Background

1.1 East Sussex County Council was inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) under the framework and evaluation schedule for Inspections of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) from 11 – 15 December 2023.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The outcome of the inspection was published 6 February and is attached at Appendix 1. The Council’s Children’s Services has been judged to be good overall and outstanding for the experiences and progress of children in care. This is a good outcome for the service and for the Council which has made keeping vulnerable people safe, a priority outcome. It is a very welcome recognition of all the hard, determined, and high-quality work we have done since our last inspection, through a time of pandemic, its continuing effects, and cost of living pressures. The judgement for each area of the inspection is set out below:

Judgement	Grade 2018 inspection	Grade 2023 inspection
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care (and care leavers 2018)	Outstanding	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers (introduced in January 2023)	N/A	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	Good

2.2. The inspectors spend most of their time with frontline staff and the inspection outcome reflects the difference staff make to the lives of children and young people in East Sussex.

2.3 The report notes:

‘Children in East Sussex continue to receive consistently strong and effective support that helps them to improve their lives. Since the last ILACS inspection in 2018, the authority has responded well to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing numbers of families experiencing financial hardship and the growing number children with complex needs who require help.’

2.4 The report highlighted key strengths including:

- Support for vulnerable children is a priority for leaders and cross-party leadership of the corporate parenting board demonstrates the collective will to do the right things for children and their families.
- Social workers are confident and experienced at identifying the range of risk factors impacting on children.
- Children’s identity and heritage are considered well in terms of planning for the right support, including their gender, sexuality and faith.
- Child-in-need and child protection plans focus on what matters most to children. They are reviewed in a timely way at multi-agency review meetings that are well attended.
- Disabled children with complex needs, supported by practitioners from the disabled children’s service, receive strong support.
- The oversight of elective home education is an area of strength. There is an effective system for the tracking of high numbers of pupils who are educated at home and staff seek to identify and support children who may be at increased risk of harm.
- Children in care, including disabled children, are well cared for and live in homes that meet their needs. Social workers consider children’s diversity needs very carefully so that they can support them to settle well with their careers and make progress in their education.
- Social workers know the children (*in care*) they support exceptionally well. They are insightful and attuned to children’s needs, helping them to express their views using individualised and bespoke communication methods.
- Governance of the virtual school is effective, and the virtual school makes a positive difference to children’s academic and personal development.
- (Care leavers) benefit from enduring and trusted relationships with workers who support them well..... The support provided to care leavers makes a positive difference as they move into adulthood.
- Care leavers are supported to maintain links with family members and other adults to ensure that they have access to a network of people who can offer them long-lasting support into adulthood.
- Leaders are taking appropriate action to expand the range of opportunities for care leavers, for example through access to council-led mentoring schemes, apprenticeships or work experience, or links to local businesses and the culture sector.
- Investment in early help services, and current work to establish a new multidisciplinary model for locality teams, as well as plans to enable the specialist SWIFT services to deliver support at an earlier point, demonstrate the corporate commitment to delivering sustainable and impactful support for children.

- The long-standing stability of the workforce enables well-rooted relationships to develop with children and care leavers in East Sussex. Leaders make no secret of the fact that the workforce is their most valuable asset.
- Workers stay in East Sussex because they feel valued and supported to do well.
- Inspectors had the pleasure of meeting a group of articulate, caring and kind young people, all of whom said that they felt safe and had someone to turn to as a trusted adult.

2.5 Ofsted provided a child friendly summary to inform children and young people about the inspection outcomes. This is attached at Appendix 2.

2.6 The report identifies three areas for improvement:

- The quality of plans for children and care leavers so that they are all specific, measurable and timebound.
- The recording of management oversight, supervision and direction.
- The oversight, timeliness and rigour of the response to children:
 - experiencing neglect, including children in Public Law Outline pre-proceedings, and
 - in private fostering arrangement

2.7 The draft post-inspection action plan in response to the report is attached at Appendix 3. The final action plan will be shared with Ofsted by 17 May 2024.

3 Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 East Sussex has maintained a focus on the key priority outcome of keeping vulnerable people safe and responded well to the impact of the pandemic, increased demand and the challenging financial context for both families and the council. Cabinet is asked to note the contents of the inspection report and the draft action plan.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None