

Media Release: Ofsted highlights ‘positive progress’ in Children’s Services, but more still to do

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Ofsted highlights ‘positive progress’ in Children’s Services, but more still to do

The support provided to children in care in Swindon is improving, according to Ofsted.

However, Swindon Borough Council needs to speed up its plans to increase the number of local care placements so less children in care are living out of the Borough and a considerable distance from their home.

Ofsted made the comments following its fourth monitoring visit to the local authority last month as inspectors continue to assess the improvements being made by the Council since the Children’s Services department was judged to be ‘inadequate’ almost two years ago.

Inspectors noted that the strength of political and corporate support for Children's Services in Swindon is strong and that the Council has invested in strategic management capacity across Children’s Services to enable operational managers to focus much more on frontline practice.

In a letter published by Ofsted, lead inspector Nick Bennison, wrote: “An increasing number of children in care are settled and making progress. They are visited regularly by social workers who build trusted relationships with them.

“Their wishes and feelings are listened to, and some children’s voices are directly influencing their care plans.”

But Mr Bennison noted that although social workers regularly involve children in direct work, the purpose and quality of this work, and its impact for children, is too variable.

The letter added: “An increasing number of children in care are achieving permanence, with their long-term carers, in a timelier way. This is much improved since the time of the last inspection and is helping children to feel more settled in care.”

Inspectors did though highlight that a number of children in care are placed at a considerable distance from their home due to a shortage of local placements, and that while some progress has been made through the local authority’s sufficiency strategy to increase the number of foster placements, more local foster carers are still needed.

The letter added: “The local authority plans to open two children’s homes, but these are at a very early stage and are not having an impact for children.”

The visibility of senior managers to the workforce, the positive impact of recent changes to the senior leadership team and regular quality assurance by managers were also highlighted as strengths.

Meanwhile, inspectors noted that staff morale is high, and that social workers are now positively focusing on the children they are working with, rather than the changes they are experiencing within Children’s Services.

Councillor Paul Dixon, Swindon Borough Council’s Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care, said: “Staff are working incredibly hard behind the scenes to deliver improvements to the services we provide for children and families in Swindon. But it is not easy.

“Some of the changes we need to make will take time, but I am pleased that Ofsted has recognised we are moving in the right direction and has highlighted where we are making progress.

“Having more local placements for the children in our care is something we are really keen to address, which is why we have introduced a sufficiency strategy. However, there is still a lot of work to do, as Ofsted has noted.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Copies of all the monitoring visit letters can be found on [Ofsted’s website](#).

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