

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council

Inspection of children's social care services

Inspection dates: 12 November 2018 to 23 November 2018

Lead inspector: Lisa Summers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness	Good

Strong and effective leadership and management have led to substantial improvements in both the quality and impact of social work practice since the last Ofsted inspection in 2015. Senior managers have created a culture in which staff feel safe and valued, enabling social work to flourish. Progress is considerable and sustained, leading to mostly good outcomes for the majority of children in care and care leavers. Children are at the heart of decision-making, and they influence and shape practice and services. Corporate parenting and grandparenting are significant strengths in Calderdale. High aspirations and a tangible determination to help, care for and protect vulnerable children are deep-rooted throughout the local authority. Despite a strengthened understanding of frontline practice through embedded performance management and improving quality assurance, managers and leaders were not aware of two areas of practice impacting adversely on some children in need of help and protection until this inspection. They took decisive action immediately to address inspectors' concerns.

Children in care and care leavers receive an outstanding service. Children swiftly move into permanent homes if they are unable to live safely with their birth parents. Tight and effective management oversight minimises delays. Children and young people have consistent and enduring relationships with committed, skilled and

determined social workers, pathway advisors and managers. They have the benefit of caring professionals who work extremely well together, helping children to remain safe and achieve well.

Services for children who need help and protection require improvement to be good. Children at risk of significant harm receive a swift and appropriate response to keep them safe. However, a lack of crisp, clear decision-making in the multi-agency safeguarding team (MAST) means that a small number of children have not received the right level of help and protection quickly enough. In most cases, children's views inform assessments and plans, and the quality of social work practice is effective. Where children are at risk of harm, too much emphasis is sometimes placed on pursuing those parents reluctant to engage, rather than taking swifter authoritative action.

What needs to improve

- The focus on children's experiences to inform: child protection and child in need plans; and the quality and timeliness of decision-making at threshold points, particularly at first contact in the MAST, and pre-proceedings.
- Planning in strategy meetings and discussions to inform next steps.
- The experience of children who present as homeless.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection requires improvement to be good.

1. Children in Calderdale benefit from well-coordinated locality-based early help services, with higher level early help accessed through an effective weekly multi-agency panel. A coherent multi-agency strategy underpins the delivery of these services. Highly committed partner agencies work together well to deliver targeted help and support to vulnerable children and their families. This includes children's centres and youth services delivering support to families from young children to older teenagers. Higher-risk cases are escalated swiftly from targeted early intervention to children's social care or are appropriately stepped down to universal and targeted support when risks have been reduced. Due to high demand, senior leaders are proactively working together at a strategic level to ensure that resources are more targeted.
2. Professionals appropriately contact the MAST and the out-of-hours social work service when they are concerned that children are at risk of being harmed. When children are at risk of significant harm, the response is timely and appropriate. However, a lack of crisp, clear management decision-making on some contacts leads to unnecessary screening or discussion at a multi-agency threshold meeting, even when risk of harm is clear. This unnecessary work impacts on social workers' ability to thoroughly explore other lower level concerns, especially given the limited resources in the MAST. This means that some children do not get the right help at the right time.
3. Parental consent is obtained and overridden where necessary, but this is not consistently recorded. For some contacts, information is only sought from children's parents and without discussions with other professionals. This reduces the effectiveness of decision-making and some contacts were closed without the concern raised being fully explored.
4. In response to the concerns identified by inspectors, senior leaders carried out an immediate review and took decisive action to address the deficits about safeguarding practice. They implemented an appropriate and detailed action plan, together with their partner agencies, in order to review processes, increase staffing and strengthen the 'front door'.
5. Child protection enquiries are timely, proportionate and thorough. A large majority of strategy meetings include the key agencies involved with the child and are held within 24 hours of the referral. Strategy meetings do not sufficiently record how enquiries should be undertaken, and this leads to insufficiently clear direction for staff. For a small number of children, police act unilaterally. This leads to police interviewing children without the support of social workers or before they have informed children's social care of the concern. This has the potential to cause further distress, with children needing

to repeat their story unnecessarily. Senior managers are working with police to refresh their joint protocol for undertaking joint visits with social care.

6. Children exposed to domestic abuse are quickly identified and protected. A multi-agency domestic abuse hub meets daily to consider the impact for children who have been directly harmed or have witnessed incidents of domestic abuse. Comprehensive information from a wide range of partners leads to timely and effective decisions about the level of help and protection that victims and children need. Actions are focused effectively on reducing risks and preventing further incidents of domestic abuse, including decisions to initiate social work assessment or progressing to child protection enquiries.
7. Children at risk of sexual exploitation, and those missing from home and care, receive highly effective multi-agency services delivered with great sensitivity by skilled workers in a dedicated child sexual exploitation team. Risk assessments are comprehensive and analytical. Communication between professionals is effective and their co-location promotes ongoing discussion about individual children. Intelligence is shared effectively and used to inform police action through arrest and targeted disruption activity. Specialist consultation, support and advice is provided across children's services. This effective communication is augmented by weekly meetings that consider all new referrals and missing episodes and review risks for children receiving social care support. Persistent relationship-based work is making a positive difference to these very vulnerable young people keeping them safer.
8. Timely assessments completed by the Children Assessment Teams (CAT) are comprehensive and analytical. Parental and children's histories are detailed, helping social workers to understand, analyse risk and inform appropriate decisions. Assessments are routinely updated to support understanding of children's changing needs. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection.
9. Most children benefit from good-quality planning. The majority of children are protected through effective and timely child protection conferences. Multi-agency plans are specific and include clear timescales focusing on reducing risk. Regular multi-agency child in need or child protection core group meetings measure progress and identify further actions to improve children's lives and reduce risk. Social workers, aided by their practice managers and Calderdale Therapeutic Team (CTS), are helped to reflect on their practice, its impact, and to identify ways to further help children, using an embedded and systemic social work model. Social workers told inspectors that they feel safe and enabled 'to make a real difference in children's lives'.
10. Some plans focus too much on the needs of adults. This reduces the emphasis on the child's experience, making it difficult to measure whether children's circumstances have changed. When parenting is not improving, or engagement is poor, particularly for some children experiencing long-term

neglect, too much energy is spent on encouraging parental engagement. Prompt action within the child's timeframe is not always taken quickly enough by social workers and their managers for children in need and those subject to child protection plans. This has left some children living at home in situations of ongoing harm for too long.

11. Effective use of the revised public law outline (PLO) tracker is starting to minimise drift and delay for those children who require statutory interventions through the courts and supports the timeliness of court proceedings. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.
12. Improving the voice of children has been a priority. This is captured well in direct work and conducted routinely by staff across all teams. Children's wishes and feelings are consistently well considered and used to inform assessments, plans and reviews. Children are supported to present their views in child protection conferences and other meetings through widely available advocacy support. Social workers know their children well as they are seen regularly, and, when appropriate, alone.
13. Children and their families benefit from excellent bespoke, skilled work, undertaken by the Family Intervention Team (FIT), with a high level of oversight from social workers and managers where appropriate. There are over 50 workers delivering intensive direct work across early intervention, child in need and child protection support. They are making a real difference to vulnerable children, helping them to remain safely at home. Tenacious, caring and highly capable practitioners provide rigorous relationship-based work, delivering a broad range of direct interventions. This child-centred approach leads to a more sophisticated and holistic understanding of children's needs, which informs ongoing planning.
14. Most children with additional vulnerabilities receive good help. Disabled children are well supported by the all-age disability service, enabling effective transitions into adult services. Allegations against professionals and the risks posed to children are robustly managed by the local authority designated officer. Well-embedded systems ensure that children missing education and those electively home educated are safeguarded. The small number of children who are privately fostered receive good support, and children are benefiting from these arrangements. This is much improved since the last inspection. There is a good awareness of the heightened risks of radicalisation among vulnerable children, and direct work is effective.
15. Homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are assessed by social workers, their needs are identified and they access a broad suite of accommodation. This includes supported accommodation, floating support and emergency accommodation. However, not all these vulnerable adolescents understand their right to be looked after and the long-term benefits this could bring.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers is outstanding

16. Children in care in Calderdale are surrounded by a team of exceptionally committed and caring staff and political leaders, placing each child firmly at the centre of their decision-making. The majority of children and young people have consistent and enduring relationships with devoted, skilled and determined social workers, pathway advisors and managers.
17. Permanence is a significant strength and the support for young people leaving care is exceptional. Senior managers have successfully secured Department for Education (DfE) innovation funding to effectively implement multi-agency edge of care services in order to prevent children entering care. The 'sleep on it' project delivers outstanding help and support tailored to each child's specific needs. As a result, the number of adolescents coming into care has reduced substantially. In addition, the innovative 'positive choices' programme provides effective support to vulnerable parents, including care leavers, enabling them to provide safe and nurturing care for their children. This is supporting younger children and babies to safely live with their families.
18. Decisions about whether children should come into care are underpinned by cogent risk assessments and accessible legal planning, and through a weekly multi-disciplinary 'gateway' panel. Permanence planning is strong. Family finding for children who cannot live safely with birth parents begins early through the 'gateway panel'. All permanence options, including special guardianship orders and adoption, are well considered simultaneously. Regular permanence planning meetings ensure progress against the child's specific care plan. Arrangements led by senior managers to track children in care are well embedded, effective and are minimising delays. All children have a clear plan for permanence by their second review. Progress is monitored effectively by visible independent reviewing officers, who escalate concerns if required. When children no longer need to be in care, most return home, with a good level of support, to their birth families.
19. Positive relationships with children and their families is central to social work practice in Calderdale. Children are visited often and are seen alone. Inspectors found many examples of sensitive and skilled direct work helping children and care leavers to understand their experiences. Staff across all teams strive to build positive relationships with their children. Assessments are updated regularly in line with care planning reviews. They are child-centred, comprehensive and analytical, and lead to children receiving appropriately focused help.
20. Children's views inform decisions about their lives. Children and young people have ready access to advocacy support and independent visitors to help them express their views. Children are very well supported to understand their life histories. This is not a one-off event. It is embedded in the culture of day-to-

day social work practice. This helps children to have a good understanding of their identity.

21. Where it is appropriate, children live with their brothers and sisters, extended family or carers, who provide them with emotional warmth and stability. Careful consideration is given to maintaining contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them.
22. Senior managers in Calderdale place high priority on children growing up in stable home environments that meet their needs, and this is being achieved. Senior managers work hard to maximise the available resources and are well focused on increasing the numbers of foster carers, specifically for children with more complex needs. Calderdale is a partner of One Adoption West Yorkshire, a regional adoption agency (RAA). This widens the pool of available adopters to meet demand. Children with a plan for adoption receive an exceptional service. This is a substantial improvement since the last inspection. Adoption is considered early. Joint working between social workers and the regional adoption agency ensures effective and timely matching. There is extensive use of fostering for adoption in Calderdale. This means that children benefit from very early permanence and move in with their new families without delay.
23. Newly recruited carers, including connected carers and potential adopters, experience an excellent level of preparation and training. The Regional Adoption Agency is currently piloting highly creative training for prospective adopters using virtual reality headsets. The virtual environment recreates the trauma that some children experience in their home lives prior to coming into care in order to better support adoption decision-making. Assessments of foster carers are analytical, evaluative and focus on carers' ability to provide safe and qualitative care for children and young people. Enhanced payments for skills support carers caring for children with more complex needs. Children benefit from creative packages of adoption and fostering support. This is enhancing carers' ability to provide a good standard of long-term care for children and young people.
24. There is excellent support for children and young people to help them achieve in life. Children's health needs are carefully considered and are well met through effective care planning. An increase of three additional health nurses has vastly improved the timeliness and quality of health assessments. Strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) are routinely completed in order to help staff understand children's emotional well-being and inform key actions in care plans.
25. Clinical expertise and advice are embedded throughout the service via the impressive Calderdale Therapeutic Team (CTS). Social workers make good use of the skills of CTS in helping them to think creatively about how best to work with children. The team, which includes clinical psychological support, are co-

located in the fostering and adoption teams, providing consultation, advice and support to all carers. Work is well targeted to help to increase carers' emotional resilience and practical skills in caring for vulnerable children, particularly those with complex needs. As a result, placement stability is improving. The recent introduction of a 'stability meeting' involving fostering and children in care social workers and CTS is intended to support fragile placements. Support is provided quickly for most children. If a placement breaks down, disruption meetings are thorough and detailed and are used to inform work with foster carers as well as future placement decisions. Leaders evaluate unplanned endings using learning to strengthen matching processes.

26. The virtual school is child-centred and highly ambitious for its children. The service is well positioned corporately to champion the education needs of children in care. There are well-developed links between the education welfare service and the Pathways team, who make a strong contribution to achieving good outcomes for care leavers as they move towards independence. Outcomes for children in care are in line with national averages for children in the early years and primary phase. In the secondary phase, children make stronger progress so that outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4 are above those of children in care nationally. Close monitoring and tracking of progress by the virtual school ensure that most children in care attend school regularly. The local authority and schools work closely together to minimise the number of exclusions. The virtual school ensures that every child in care has a comprehensive personal education plan.
27. Managers, pathway advisers and social workers in the commissioned 'pathways' team provide exceptional service 24 hours a day. They are passionate about their young people and talk with great pride about their achievements. Young people were positively glowing about the support they receive. They described to inspectors how they are treated 'like family' and how staff 'go the extra mile' for them. Transition planning starts early in Calderdale, at the age of 15. This maximises opportunities for children to build meaningful and trusting relationships with their workers. Pathway plans are jointly developed over several visits, and at the young person's pace. This enables young people to plan their own lives and their future.
28. Calderdale demonstrates its significant commitment as a corporate parent in many ways. Persistent, respectful and hugely creative work is enabling an impressive number of young people to access employment, education and training. This includes, for example, creating bespoke employment opportunities to support young parents who are balancing parenting commitments while attending university. The pathways team works hard to remove barriers that could prevent young people accessing further and higher education. Financial support is well targeted and used thoughtfully to incentivise progression into meaningful further or higher education courses. As a result, many young people are currently in higher education, with 11% supported to attend and complete university. This sustainability is impressive.

29. Calderdale invests heavily in providing its young people with excellent opportunities to become successful adults. For example, an increase in the number of young people employed by, or seconded to, the pathways service has empowered young people to have a persuasive and strong voice. They act as role models, showing aspiration and encouraging the same in other young people. They proactively challenge senior managers and elected members and hold them to account. This is welcomed and used to inform and shape practice for all children in care and care leavers. The local authority consistently provides opportunities for work and apprenticeships that lead to permanent positions. The needs of children and young people not in employment, education or training are well understood, and focused work is undertaken to engage and support them. Young parents are very well supported to achieve, both through direct employment with the council and through the innovation funded 'positive choices' project.
30. Children are fully engaged in planning for their futures and move towards independence at a pace that is right for them. Care leavers understand their rights and entitlements through a range of accessible information which they designed, including pages of the council website. They are routinely provided with all the key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults. Children are actively encouraged and enabled to stay put with their foster carers after the age of 18, when this is what they want, and is in their best interests. There are an extensive range of housing options available for young people. Established joint work with housing providers means that young people are supported to prepare for managing a tenancy through bespoke training. As a result, almost all live in suitable accommodation.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families is good

31. Strong management and leadership have led to considerable improvements in social work practice since the last Ofsted inspection. Senior leaders demonstrate considerable and sustained progress. For example, permanence is now a significant strength, and there are remarkably good outcomes for the majority of children in care, adopted children and care leavers. Senior managers and leaders have created a culture in which social work practice is flourishing, with increased staff stability and good access to a range of training and work-based opportunities. Performance management is now well embedded throughout the service and improving quality assurance has enabled leaders to identify and successfully tackle most weaker areas of practice. Despite many successes, there are still some areas that have not yet been effectively addressed or understood. Quality assurance and auditing are not always enabling senior managers to understand children's experiences or identify all necessary learning. The impact of this was identified during the inspection in the MAST and at pre-proceedings. Throughout the inspection, senior managers were open, reflective and responsive, taking robust action to

address any concerns immediately and to implement a comprehensive plan. They fully embraced the learning opportunity that the inspection provided, which has informed their thinking on how best to further enhance children's lives.

32. Services for children are protected and have increased in times of austerity, with ongoing political financial commitment. Leaders have a good understanding of children's services through regular reports to scrutiny, performance interrogation and regular meetings between the director of children services (DCS), chief executive and lead member. The chief executive and newly appointed DCS are visible leaders and are fervent supporters of Calderdale's children and young people. Children told us that they feel highly valued by their corporate parents and grandparents through celebratory events such as Christmas lunch and annual awards. The DCS is highly regarded by partners, who recognise her as a catalyst for positive change and improvement across all areas of children services.
33. The culture in Calderdale is one of reflection, learning and appropriate action. Senior managers have embraced learning from the last Ofsted inspection, and have used this to effectively inform their priorities. The local authority knows its children well. This has informed their systemic approach to improvement, prioritising the areas of greatest impact for the children of Calderdale. Strong collaborative working with partners is reflected through shared priorities which improve children's lives. This includes, for example, the transformed approach to edge of care services, impactful work for children at risk of sexual exploitation, the development of the domestic abuse hub, and dedicated therapeutic support for children, social workers and foster carers. Positive relationships with Cafcass and the courts and effective monitoring of the use of PLO mean that children benefit from timely and efficient progression through the court system.
34. The local authority is a highly ambitious corporate parent and grandparent, extending its commitment to the children of those in care and care leavers. This is helping children to be 'happy, healthy, safe and successful'. Permanence is now a significant strength because of the close attention and tracking of managers. Assiduous management action and monitoring are reducing delays for children. Children with a plan for adoption now move in with their new families quickly. Children in care are well supported, and education and health outcomes are improving. Effective commissioning and monitoring of care leaving services ensure that there is a sharp focus on improving outcomes for care leavers, as well as securing employment and work experience opportunities.
35. Senior managers and leaders really listen to children and young people. Children's voices are at the centre of influencing and shaping practice and service delivery. Staff work diligently to support children and young people to express their views. Right 2 voice and Upwards and Onwards (UnO) are highly

active and impactful, children in care council. Children chair the corporate parenting panel on a bi-monthly basis, and directly influence decisions made about them. The work of Right 2 voice is powerful, impacting positively on all children in care and care leavers. Children and young people have led the development of the local offer and have updated the 'pledge' to care leavers. They have developed 'top tips' for being a good corporate parent that have been shared with 2,500 council staff so far.

36. Performance management has been significantly strengthened. There is a strong performance culture in Calderdale across all levels of service, using live performance dashboards. Social workers and managers actively monitor caseloads and timeliness of key social work tasks, including those identified from practice audits. Information is routinely collated and scrutinised by senior managers and leaders. This includes IRO reports, learning from compliments and complaints, feedback from Right 2 voice and UnO. This is done while tightly monitoring and responding to changes in service demands and social work caseloads. Information is used intelligently to prioritise thematic audits in order to better understand practice.
37. Quality assurance systems are improving. The volume of auditing activity has increased and enhanced, including self-audits by social workers, and the use of direct observation and feedback from children and families. Actions from audits are routinely monitored by team managers for completion and themes identified to inform training and policy changes. Managers accept that more work is needed to further improve the effectiveness of their audit tools, so that, in future, areas of concern can be identified earlier.
38. Senior managers have created a culture in which staff feel valued and safe. Social work is flourishing. It is evident across all levels of social care that all staff are treated with dignity and kindness. This approach has created an environment in which social workers feel listened to and supported to develop their skills and knowledge. This investment makes social workers want to stay and work in Calderdale and ensures that workers have the right skills to improve children's lives. Reduced staff turnover and manageable caseloads provide social workers with the opportunities to build trusting relationships with children and their families in order to help make the necessary changes. Individual and group supervision is regular, reflective and focuses well on those tasks needing to be accomplished. Management oversight is tight and clear.



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