

London Borough of Merton Single Inspection and LSCB review Ofsted Outcomes 25 August 2017



Ofsted Single Inspection

During 4 very warm weeks in June (12 June 2017 to 6 July 2017)
7 Ofsted inspectors, 2 data analysts and 1 quality assurance manager...
finally arrived* and...

- Interviewed 206 staff and partners
- Tracked and audited 162 cases
- Requested and reviewed 429 documents
- And sat through a range of meetings observed and focused groups attended

- *During the inspection we were also visited by....Ofsted's Chief Inspector of Social Care, the Regional Director and ...the new Minister of State!

“Children in Merton benefit from services that are dynamic, ambitious and successful. Exceptional leadership and governance and strong frontline management ensure that children’s services are consistently good. All children receive a good service and some receive an outstanding service. Inspectors saw that significant and sustained improvements had been achieved since the last inspection in 2012, when all services were judged as good. Staff are very effective in improving outcomes for children.”

Single Inspection Ofsted report published August 2017

Key Judgement Area: The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Good

- *“Consistently good services support children in need of help and protection in Merton, improving their circumstances and keeping them safe.”*
- *“Children are protected through an outstanding early help offer and a robust ‘front door’, to consider which intervention would help them best.... Effective intervention at an early stage is having a positive impact on the number of children who require more specialist support.”*
- *“Staff in the MASH....ensure prompt and proportionate responses so that children receive appropriate and timely services....Staff have a good understanding of risk....Thresholds are clearly and consistently applied for children, including when their circumstances and needs change.”*
- *“Child protection enquiries are timely....step up step down processes are well considered...MA information sharing has improved significantly..... The vast majority of cases (show)..appropriate safeguarding concerns...developed in regular CIN and CP conferences...escalations of concerns are appropriate.”*
- *“Managers and staff know their children well. Manageable caseloads and skilled staff mean that they are able to visit children and their families regularly, build meaningful relationships and undertake purposeful direct work.”*
- *“The social work model used by children’s services is helpfully applied by other agencies, and this is leading to improvements in the quality of work to assess risks.”*

Key Judgement Area: The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Good

- *“Children’s wishes and feelings are strongly heard and clearly reflected in practice. Their views and voices are carefully considered in assessments, strategy meetings and social work records to inform planning... Inspectors saw very effective use of advocacy, including appropriate advocacy for children who have disabilities. Increasing numbers of advocates are working with children subject to child protection procedures, to ensure consideration of their views in conferences.”*
- *“Children who have disabilities receive support and services that ensure that they are protected and achieve.”*
- *“Children living in private fostering arrangements receive a good service”.*
- *“There are clear and effective arrangements to identify and respond to children going missing or missing education”*
- *“Young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless receive timely and thorough joint assessments with housing services.”*
- *“Risks associated with child sexual exploitation, missing children, gang involvement or radicalisation are understood exceptionally well and overseen appropriately from a senior multi-agency perspective.”*

Key Judgement Area: The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Good

- *“Children looked after in Merton receive a consistently good service. The needs of each individual child are known well. Children become looked after at the right time and without unnecessary delay..... The role of the corporate parent is well embedded and is taken very seriously.”*
- *“Effective management oversight of pre-proceedings and assessment work adds rigour to decision-making and ensures safe oversight of the experiences for children on the threshold of being looked after.”*
- *“Children are protected well through appropriate use of the court process...The judiciary and the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) are extremely complimentary about the work of the local authority, considering it robust and timely. With proceedings completed within an average of 24 weeks, Merton is exceeding national guidelines and has improved in this area of practice considerably.”*
- *“Care planning is effective...Caseloads are maintained at a manageable level to enable social workers to have time to develop relationships with the children.”*
- *“Children who are looked after by Merton benefit from good-quality placements, social workers who visit them often and strong support from the virtual school.”*
- *“Social workers act quickly to protect children in their care.”*

Key Judgement Area: The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Good

- *“Permanence options are considered early, ensuring that there is no delay in the formulation of long-term plans.... Family finding for permanent foster placements is tenacious, and children who are waiting for families benefit from the same determined approach as those seeking adoptive families. Approved foster carers safely meet the needs of a range of children, including those who have complex needs or disabilities and groups of brothers and sisters.”*
- *“Children have good quality up-to date and timely PEPs,... education targets are clear... The (Virtual School) team make strenuous efforts to ensure YP engage in learning.”*
- *“The health of children looked after is effectively monitored and overseen and children and young people receive good support from the virtual school wherever they live.”*
- *“The majority of children in Merton benefit from secure and stable placements.”*
- *“The service to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is impressive. It is sensitive and swift and enables the children to settle quickly and to form friendships.”*
- *“Children’s participation is encouraged, their individual needs are known and their voice is evident... and active CICC influences and guides services for children looked after.”*

**Key Judgement Area:
Adoption performance**

Outstanding

- *“Adoption performance is outstanding, with all children requiring adoption currently placed and no children waiting. Merton has not had an adoption placement breakdown for over five years.”*
- *“Strategic leaders, managers and social workers have an excellent knowledge about the children in their care, and they are passionate about achieving the very best outcomes.”*
- *“Timely and accurate early identification of children, when adoption is in their best interests, leads to appropriate and prompt family finding... Children benefit from early identification of potential matches with approved adopters, including before the granting of the placement order, and move swiftly to live with their new families following the court decision.”*
- *“The quality of prospective adopter reports is impressive. Child permanence reports are comprehensive and analytical and lead to a logical recommendation for adoption.”*
- *“Appropriate contact with birth families is supported, and children are assisted to understand their life histories at a time and pace that is suitable for them. Life story work is of a consistently high quality.”*
- *“Adoption support is excellent and highly creative. It ensures that adopted children form strong attachments to their families, and potential issues are identified and addressed at the earliest stage.”*

Key Judgement Area:
Experiences and progress of care leavers

Good

- *“Care leavers do well in Merton. The vast majority are in touch with staff, and determined efforts are made to re-engage with those who are not.”*
- *“Social workers and PAs know and understand their YPs individual circumstances... (SWs) manage known risks...develop effective plans...and over time YP make good progress...The majority of young people who leave care receive good support that builds their skills and confidence well as they move towards independence.”*
- *“All young people who spoke to inspectors feel that they are safe where they live. With good support from carers, the 14-plus team and housing providers, many young people make a successful transition from care to living independently.....The large majority live in suitable accommodation.”*
- *“The virtual school, social workers and personal advisers effectively support young people to navigate the education, employment and training (EET) options. Young people seeking to study at university receive particularly good assistance prior to applying for a university place, and they receive practical help with their applications and personal statements. This results in a high number of young people studying at university.”*
- *“Care leavers who are more vulnerable, such as those in custody, are equally well supported by staff, who are sometimes the only regular visitors while they serve their sentences.”*

**Key Judgement Area:
Leadership, management and governance**

Outstanding

- *“Senior managers and politicians model a constructive, enquiring and engaging style of leadership and management. It comprises a blend of compassion and concern for the most vulnerable children and families, and conspicuous care and support for frontline workers.”*
- *“The DCS... provides a sustained and energetic commitment to continually improving outcomes for children... The quality of all services is good or better, building on the “good” judgements... (2012)... The leadership style emphasises the core values of compassion, humility, social justice and inclusion... An influential corporate parenting board chaired by the longstanding and experienced CEO illustrates the importance given at the highest level.”*
- *“Strong partnership, shared accountability are clearly evidenced. The CEO, Lead Member and DCS all have active membership roles (HWBB, VAWG S&S, YCEB - which ensures)... strategic plans and localised improvement plans are aligned with each other and are overseen by mature and exceptionally strong partnerships.”*
- *“Work with the police is highly integrated... (P&PYP) is chaired by an experienced and knowledgeable specialist... The strong professional partnerships in Merton demonstrate that children and their families are highly valued and that they deserve high-quality services.”*
- *“The DCS and AD CSC& YI and all managers maintain a high level of interest, curiosity and knowledge about children’s cases.”*

**Key Judgement Area:
Leadership, management and governance**

Outstanding

- *“Led by the AD CSC&YI... Merton’s social work practice model is at the centre of the continuous development of effective and evidence-based social work with children and families... (delivering a) coherent practice model to assist social workers in their analysis, manageable caseloads, frequent supervision, reflective auditing and mature partnerships... (leading to) a strong culture of learning and a determination to improve further on outcomes that are already good.”*
- *“Strong frontline managers, carefully managed workloads and an evidence-informed approach create time for social workers to practise creative and effective direct work with children. This leads to well-crafted assessments and interventions, which are concentrated on understanding and improving the experiences of children.”*
- *“An increase of social workers... has supported manageable caseloads and enabled changes to the workload of the MASH, the safeguarding teams and a dedicated permanence service.... Innovative and creative thinking ensures that Merton achieves maximum impact from the resources available.”*
- *“High-quality data and performance information are used well at all strategic and operational groups and across all management layers. The performance and quality assurance frameworks are closely interwoven and provide a wide range of useful information.”*

**Key Judgement Area:
Leadership, management and governance**

Outstanding

- *“A restless ambition to continuously develop better practice is discernible, led by an AD who is a committed, motivational and skilled social work leader.... Performance and QA frameworks are closely aligned and mutually re-enforcing. Auditing is well targeted.”*
- *“Senior managers are resolute in their commitment to recruit able and committed social workers, who continue to provide high-quality services to the most vulnerable children and families... Well-defined career progression pathways encourage committed and talented social workers to progress and flourish.”*
- *“Interventions with C&YP vulnerable to extremist influences are well planned and effective... and well designed... including regular work with local schools.”*
- *“Strong and impressive early help services, improved educational attainment and high quality targeted and specialist services are prioritised in equal measure by leaders and senior managers. These include a prominent focus on disabled children and children who have special educational needs.”*
- *“Children exposed to sexual exploitation receive protective and well-developed strategic and MA responses. MA governance is tightly co-ordinated and led by the MSCB.”*
- *“Young people are both involved and highly influential.”*

Ofsted Recommendations

1. Ensure that all plans, including child in need, child protection, care plans for children looked after and pathway plans, consistently contain specific actions, achievable timescales and clear, measurable outcomes.
2. Improve the use of return home interviews for each episode of missing for children missing from home or care and ensure that risks are understood and reduced for individual children.
3. Ensure that 'staying put' is made available to all care leavers who would benefit from this.
4. Ensure that all former relevant care leavers receive information on their health histories.

**Key Judgement Area:
Local Safeguarding Childrens Board**

Outstanding

- *“Merton’s Local Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) is outstanding. It is highly effective in holding agencies to account for their individual safeguarding arrangements in the welfare and protection of children.”*
- *“There are strong governance arrangements underpinned by established partnerships with other strategic boards, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Corporate Parenting Board, the Children’s Trust and the Safer and Stronger Partnership.”*
- *“The Board is well attended by capable strategic senior managers and the contribution and participation of the voluntary sector and lay members greatly enhances the effectiveness of the board’s work. The collaboration of partners at both strategic and operational level allows for alerts and trends to be identified and acted on swiftly.”*
- *“The board’s strategic priorities are relevant and informed by detailed analysis of local need to target the most vulnerable children, including children at risk of sexual exploitation and extremism and children missing from home or care.”*
- *“There is a sustained commitment to and focus on the delivery of the board’s safeguarding priorities, including families in which adult mental health, neglect, alcohol, drugs and domestic violence feature in children’s lives. The safeguarding needs of children pervade the board’s work and business and subgroup plans.”*
- *“There are no recommendations for the MSCB.”*

Children's services in the London Borough of Merton are good.

1. Children who need help and protection	Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
2.1 Adoption performance	Outstanding
2.2 Experiences and progress for care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
4. Review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board	Outstanding



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