



A PILOT JOINT INSPECTION OF **CHILD PROTECTION ARRANGEMENTS** IN THE SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST AREA

JUNE 2023

WHAT IS A PILOT INSPECTION AND WHY DO IT?

- ▶ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI), the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) wanted to work together to test how a joint inspection of child protection could be carried out in Northern Ireland (NI).
- ▶ This is the first time this type of inspection has been done by the three justice, health and social care and education Inspectorates in NI. This type of joint inspection already happens in England and Wales.
- ▶ We wanted to find out how organisations worked together and how professionals were supported to protect children when there are concerns about risk of harm. We also wanted to learn how we worked together as Inspectorates to inform a new joint inspection framework.

HOW DID YOU DO IT?

- ▶ CJI, the RQIA and the ETI worked together to carefully plan how we would carry out a pilot inspection with our current legislative powers and working practices.
- ▶ We agreed how each Inspectorate would work together to gather and assess evidence to inform our findings and a joint report.

WHO DID YOU INSPECT?

- ▶ The Southern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (Police Service), the Education Authority (EA) and schools took part in the pilot inspection.

WHAT DID YOU LOOK AT?

- ▶ We looked at the response across health and social care, policing and education services under the three key areas of *Promote*, *Prevent* and *Protect*.
- ▶ This pilot inspection looked at the 'front door' or point of referral response to children aged 12 to 17 years old in the Trust area.
- ▶ Inspectors visited policing teams, Social Work and Health Care teams including a hospital accident and emergency department, and schools during the inspection fieldwork.
- ▶ We spoke to professionals and examined information and data from each organisation, including an in-depth analysis of the multi-agency response to referrals relating to a small number of children.

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DID YOU SPEAK TO CHILDREN?

No, we agreed that because children and their families had just recently been referred to services it would be better if we didn't this time. This is something we want to include in any future inspections and we need to carefully consider how it is done.

WHAT WORKED WELL?

- ▶ When the threat of harm was acute, there was evidence that risk was identified in a timely way.
- ▶ There was a strong culture of promoting the child's right to be safe among professionals we talked to.
- ▶ Innovative practice was at times evident with schools, Social Workers and Police Officers working collaboratively to identify support options and engage with children.
- ▶ We observed *Operation Encompass* in practice and how the police and schools worked together to support children where there had been domestic abuse at home.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

- ▶ Evidence of the voice of the child in assessment and planning by professionals on what should happen to a child.
- ▶ Better understanding of roles across organisations and how to work together to progress referrals for safeguarding and protection.
- ▶ More opportunities provided for multi-disciplinary training.
- ▶ Greater priority on monitoring waiting lists.
- ▶ Consider how partners could work better together to improve the response to children.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- ▶ The Trust, the Police Service and the EA have been asked to develop a multi-agency action plan for implementation to enhance their partnership approach to protecting children.
- ▶ We hope other Trust areas, police districts and education settings are interested in the findings and recommendations from this pilot inspection and use it to assess and improve how children are protected in their area.
- ▶ The pilot inspection and lessons learned from it helps the Department of Health, the Department of Justice and other officials to develop a framework for joint child protection in Northern Ireland. Inspectors will be providing a report to support this.



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