

18 December 2025

Mr Nigel Chapman
Director, Children, Young People & Community Development
Brent Civic Centre,
Engineers Way, Wembley,
London HA9 0FJ

Dear Mr Chapman

Focused visit to Brent children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Brent children's services on 18 and 19 November 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Michele Henry and Nicholas Stacey.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in care.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

Headline findings

Since the last ILACS inspection in February 2023, children in care continue to benefit from effective services led by an experienced, stable senior team, with strong political and corporate support helping them to sustain the conditions for effective frontline practice. Leaders are reflective and have an in-depth understanding of service strengths and of the discrete areas where they need to make improvements.

The progress leaders have made in overcoming previous recruitment challenges and strengthening workforce stability and retention has been particularly important for children in care. Children enjoy stable and supportive relationships with their social workers, who know them well and see them regularly. The enduring, trusting relationships that children have with their social workers and carers provide a secure base from which they can grow, feel safe, develop confidence and thrive in care. Children say they are happy with the care and support they receive.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?¹

- The consistency and rigour of responses to children who go missing from care (Outcome 3, national framework)

¹ The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

- Life-story work for children in long-term care (Outcome 4, national framework).

Main findings

Children are supported to live within their extended kinship network when it is safe for them to do so. When this is not possible, social workers, carers and parents work collaboratively to help children maintain their relationships with family and friends.

Most children in care live in homes that are suited to their needs. Social workers and carers thoughtfully consider their religious and cultural needs. Many children live with carers who share their religious and cultural backgrounds.

Disabled children in care receive good support. Their social workers skilfully develop relationships with children and their families and have a sound understanding of their needs. These children live in stable homes with caring families and receive strong multi-agency support.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive thoughtful care. Their social workers are especially attuned to their needs. They make timely arrangements to respond to children's education and health needs, and children access effective support, tailored to their circumstances. Senior leaders have good oversight of the progress of this group of children. They have recently commissioned a new service to provide them with mentoring, therapeutic help and other well-being support.

Decision-making for children in care is informed by thorough assessments of their needs, providing a clear rationale for their care plans. Social workers ensure that their assessments are comprehensive, child centred and updated when children's circumstances change.

Direct work with children is evident in lively and engaging methods, enabling children to share their feelings, including their worries, and providing the opportunity for them to explore sensitive matters with their social workers. Direct work with disabled children is especially strong. Carers and social workers regularly gather photos and other reminders of children's lives.

Social workers and independent reviewing officers capture children's experience through detailed and sensitively written records. Children are listened to, and their views are taken into consideration about where and with whom they live.

While direct work is routinely carried out, social workers are not consistently capturing children's life stories, allowing them to better understand their personal histories and to integrate their past and present experiences. This was also noted at the last ILACS inspection.

When children in care go missing, the response is inconsistent. Return home interviews are not always completed, leading to gaps in risk assessment. Management oversight and actions to mitigate risk are not always clear from

children's records. This means that opportunities are not always taken to mitigate risk and to reduce the likelihood of children going missing in the future.

The work of the virtual school is having a positive impact for children in care, with most children progressing well and some achieving particularly high results in their exams. Children in care attend school regularly, and there have been no permanent exclusions. Children also have good opportunities to take part in a wide range of enrichment and fun activities, including an annual celebration event.

The health of children in care is promoted effectively. A dedicated emotional and well-being service helps to ensure that children in care receive timely support when required.

Children in care benefit from improvements made to the independent reviewing officer (IRO) service since the last inspection. Increased IRO capacity and manageable workloads mean that IROs are better able to scrutinise children's plans robustly, preventing drift and delays in care planning and securing permanence. Most children participate in their reviews, and they receive carefully crafted letters confirming to them the outcome of the meeting. Children say that they know their IROs well and how to contact them if they need to. Mid-way reviews help to keep children's progress on track, and IROs escalate issues to tackle problems when identified. Managers are putting steps in place to improve the way the IRO 'footprint' is captured on children's records.

Children also say that they know senior leaders in the local authority and that they are given opportunities to be included and influence services. Participation is a priority for the council; senior leaders are always looking for ways to include children in care in decision-making.

Leaders in Brent are keen to improve placement sufficiency for children in care, and they are actively pursuing initiatives with other London boroughs. Brent developed its own local foster carers' constellation in May 2025. It is developing well and supporting the work of the foster carers involved, allowing children to live in stable homes with supportive adults. The council is also progressing plans for its own children's home, to allow more children in care to live in the local area, close to their families, friends and schools.

Social workers speak very positively about working in Brent. Many of them note the ethnic diversity within the community among the reasons they like working in the area. Social workers describe managers who are accessible and knowledgeable, who are interested in their personal well-being and their professional development. They describe senior leaders as visible, approachable and humble.

Plentiful training and development opportunities mean that social workers feel that they can progress their careers in Brent.

Social workers in the care planning teams have manageable caseloads, allowing them to focus the time needed on each child. Some social workers working with

disabled children in care have significantly higher caseloads, which means they have less time to work with individual children. Senior leaders are aware of this and have put actions in place as they implement the Families First reforms, although the impact is yet to be seen.

Regular management oversight and supervision support effective practice with most children in care. Senior managers maintain good oversight of decision-making and planning for children through case discussion, permanence tracking and residential panels. Leaders are working to better align permanence tracking across service areas to strengthen monitoring in the earlier stages of children's plans and allow children to move more quickly into permanent homes.

An honest and thorough self-evaluation forms the basis for continuous learning and a developing quality assurance process. Quality assurance activity provides leaders with a balanced appraisal of the quality and impact of social work practice for children in care. Leaders target training to areas of practice that audits, and other quality assurance activity, have highlighted as needing improvement. Senior leaders are working to enhance the auditing skills of frontline managers to increase internal quality assurance capacity.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Michele Henry
His Majesty's Inspector