



OFSTED PRAISES ‘OUTSTANDING’ PROGRESS IN CHESHIRE SERVICE TO CHILDREN

Cafcass, the organisation that gives children a voice in family court cases has made ‘outstanding’ progress in its Cheshire services, according to an Ofsted report.

Inspectors praised the team for its [‘outstanding’ improvements](#) in ensuring that all children in family court cases get the expert help they need quickly, and without delay, in both divorce and separation, and local authority care cases.

Colette Dutton, the Head of Service for the area said, “In the last year Cafcass has provided a vital service to nearly 3,000 children in Cheshire and the progress we’ve made means that each of the children we’re working with is getting the help they need, and getting it quickly. Our experienced practitioners play a crucial role in making sure children really are put first in family court cases and that the often life-changing decisions that are made about them by the courts are in their best interests. I am delighted that children and families in the area are receiving the ‘good’ service that they deserve.”

Ofsted found that the team had taken ‘highly effective steps’ to ensure that an expert practitioner was quickly assigned to each child’s case and praised the team for their work in quickly identifying any safety concerns about children. Overall, the progress in the area was rated as ‘good’.

Colette added, “In the last two years we’ve seen an increase in the numbers of children needing our help, with 36% more children the subject of local authority care applications, and 11% more children getting caught up in the cross fire of their parents’ divorce or separation. We’ve had to adopt new ways of working in order to help all of these children. But these have been successful and each and every child’s case in the area currently has a practitioner working on it, helping to keep the child safe. We’ve also ensured that all reports to court in divorce and separation cases are filed with the court on time so that decisions on children’s futures can be made without delay.”

Ofsted found the team’s joint working with other agencies and community groups to keep children safe was ‘good’ and praised the ‘highly effective’ senior management in the area. However, Colette insisted it was a team effort: “Staff in the area are completely focused on providing the best possible service to children and they have really risen to the challenge. I know that with their determination, we’ll continue to improve even further.”

Anthony Douglas, Chief Executive, said, “This inspection result is the third “good” result that we have received recently and demonstrates that at the same time we’ve absorbed more work, we have also improved the quality of our service. Our work now is to continue, as we have been, to replicate this improvement across the country.”

**For further information please contact:
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Notes for Editors:

- The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) represents children in family court cases, making sure that their voices are heard and that the decisions that are made about them are in their best interests.
- Cafcass operates 19 service areas across England. Service area C7 covers Cheshire and Merseyside.
- In 2010-11 Cafcass worked 2,928 children in family court cases in Cheshire.
- Cafcass was working on 545 care cases in March 2010, compared to 638 care cases in March 2011 (Cheshire and Merseyside combined).
- Public law care demand in Cheshire has increased by 36% in the last 2 years from 131 cases in 2008-09 to 178 in 2010-11.
- Private law demand in Cheshire has increased by 11% in the last 2 years from 821 cases in 2008-09 to 914 in 2010-11.
- The report can be accessed on the Ofsted website by [clicking here](#).
- Cafcass' role is to work with children and families in the family courts. The following list provides some examples of the types of cases we work with:-
 - Adoption (public law)
 - Care Orders (public law)
 - Emergency Protection Orders (public law)
 - Residency and contact following divorce and separation (private law)
- Cafcass is sponsored by the Department for Education and is a non-departmental public body.
- In 2006 Cafcass established a Young People's Board who have experience of our services. They advise us on matters of policy and practice.

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