care inspectorate

Report of a joint inspection of services for children and young people subject to compulsory supervision orders living at home with their parents in South Ayrshire

Prepared by the Care Inspectorate in partnership with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

8 May 2026

Education Scotland Foghlam Alba

Healthcare Improvement Scotland

HMICS Improving Policing Across Scotland

HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

Keeping the promise at the heart of what we do

We would like to thank everyone who took part in our inspection.

Care experienced young people in South Ayrshire were invited to design the cover for this report. We would like to thank the young person who created the artwork and we appreciate their valuable contribution.

Inspection summary of children, young people and families

Who we are

We are a team of inspectors who spent time in South Ayrshire from November 2025 - March 2026. It was our job to find out what was working well for children and their families.

We wanted to learn more about the support provided by local services to a specific group of children: children living with their parents who have been on **compulsory supervision orders***.

***Compulsory supervision orders** mean that the local authority has responsibility for looking after and helping the child or young person.

What we did during the inspection

What we learned about your area

Most children and young people were getting the help they needed.

Children and young people were being listened to, and they helped inform how services were developed.

Most children and young people had good relationship with staff, who worked hard to support them.

Leaders recognised that people's needs were changing and understood that services had to be delivered differently. This was helping make people's lives better .

Our approach

The joint inspection of services for children and young people subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home with their parents in South Ayrshire took place between November 2025 and March 2026.

Joint inspection teams include inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland. Teams also include young inspection volunteers, who are young people with direct experience of care or child protection services. Young inspection volunteers receive training and support and contribute to joint inspections using their knowledge and experience to help us to better understand the quality and impact of partners' work. Teams also may include associate assessors who are professionals from other organisations, who work as part of an inspection team for the duration of a particular inspection. More information about our approach to our joint inspections can be found here.

Information about the range of evidence gathered during this inspection can be found in Appendix 1. We take a consistent approach to inspections by using the quality framework for children and young people in need of care and protection. Inspectors collect and review evidence against all 23 quality indicators in the framework to examine three key lines of inquiry which link with **the promise** foundations. In the final section of our report we evaluate four quality indicators using our six-point scale. We also provide a confidence statement and outline next steps.

Throughout the report there are some terms which are in **bold**. This means that they are defined in the glossary which can be accessed here. At the beginning of the glossary, we define what we mean by child, parent, and carer and subject to a compulsory supervision order while living at home. There is also an area specific glossary at the end of this report.

As the findings in this joint inspection are based on a sample of children and young people, we cannot assure the quality of service received by every single child and young person in South Ayrshire who are subject to compulsory supervision orders living at home with their parents.

Context

South Ayrshire's population was estimated at 112,260 in June 2024. Since 2001, overall growth has been minimal (0.1% increase), with declines in all age groups under 45. In contrast, the population over 45 has grown; most notably those 75+, increased by 48.28%. Looking ahead to 2032, the area's total population is not expected to grow, unlike Scotland overall (+4.4%). The 0–15 age group is projected to fall the most (–14.6%), while the over 75 group is expected to continue its strong growth[1].

[1] National Records of Scotland

20.7% of children in South Ayrshire were living in poverty after housing costs in 2023/24, which is on par with the Scottish average for the same period[2].

Public transport was limited in some rural areas. Regional bus fares were generally high, at times higher than the equivalent train journey. They were consistently perceived by the public to be higher than the cost of private car travel. This contributed to transport poverty within the authority area, impacting on individual's access to employment and education[3].

Children and young people 'looked after' by the local authority[4].

On 31 July 2024 there were 196 '**looked after**' children and young people in South Ayrshire. This equated to around 2% 'looked after' as a percentage of the local population, in line with the Scottish average. At that time around one-quarter of those children and young people were subject to a supervision order and living at home with their parents, which was more than the overall Scottish average.

[2] Improvement Service

[3] South Ayrshire Active Travel Strategy 2022-2032

[4] Scottish Government – Children's Social Work Statistics

Key messages

- Leaders placed priority on upholding the rights of children and young people.
- Staff were creative, agile and solution focused in the ways they supported children and young people, demonstrating a high level of professional commitment.
- The partnership's approach to early intervention was positively influencing outcomes, helping to prevent needs from escalating and ensuring that children and young people received timely support.
- The quality of plans for children and young people was inconsistent. Strengths in assessment and practice were not always translated clearly into effective planning.
- All parents and almost all children and young people had opportunities to build a relationship with a key member of staff, resulting in strengthened continuity and trust.
- An inclusive approach to involving children, young people and parents in reviews and decision-making processes, enabled meaningful participation.
- Leaders encouraged innovative practice, including the introduction of **Radical Place Leadership**. They demonstrated a sustained focus on improvement, and a commitment to embedding the promise.
- Leaders recognised the need for whole systems change and service redesign in response to changing needs and financial pressures. Impactful programmes were beginning to transform children's services.

Inspection findings

Key Line of enquiry 1

Children and young people are well supported to live with their families. This support helps to keep them safe, overcome difficulties and makes a positive difference in their lives.

Relationships

Staff consistently built strong, nurturing relationships with children, young people and families, recognising these as the foundation of effective practice. A positive cultural shift had strengthened children and young people's participation in decisions and planning. Professionals were adaptive so that the adults with the strongest relationships led key work, with staff showing agility and confidence across traditional boundaries.

The adoption of **Safe and Together** and **Signs of Safety** approaches improved engagement and reflected staff's strong understanding of trauma and the need for trust to support change.

Children and young people described consistently supportive relationships across services. Almost all parents felt well supported by staff, but a very small number felt that help could have come earlier, indicating some inconsistency in the support experienced.

Support to remain at home with families

The partnership had invested in early intervention. Statutory and third sector services worked cohesively to offer universal, specialist and targeted support. Parenting programmes such as the **Peep Learning Together Programme** was highly valued in helping parents to understand the needs of infants and very young children. Based on feedback from parents who said they wanted better consistency of parenting advice, **Togetherness** (previously Solihull) was being rolled out across the partnership. Operating across the eight school clusters, **Family First forums** ensured school-aged children, young people and their families could access timely and well-coordinated support to meet their needs within their local communities. Devolved funding allowed for flexible, needs led use of resources.

At the time of this inspection, almost half of the children and young people who were subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home were **young carers.** The partnership worked well together to identify the needs of young carers and offer well-rounded support. The recognition of the differing needs between age groups of young carers was remarkable, identifying *wee carers* (primary-aged) and *teeny*

carers (under-fives). This demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the scale and diversity of need.

Some children and young people experienced a move during the period of their compulsory supervision order, and a small number experienced more than two moves. Most received effective support to maintain relationships with brothers, sisters and other family members, upholding the promise foundations of *family* and *care*. The quality and impact of interventions was no different for those children and young people, compared with others who experienced no moves, demonstrating effective continuity of support.

Thriving Communities has established four locality-based teams in South Ayrshire. The teams are responsible for coordinating community learning and development, community safety, employability and health and wellbeing provision at a local level. Along with local partners, the service provided a wide range of supports to care experienced children, young people and their families within their local communities. All activities were designed to promote wellbeing, life skills, inclusion and a sense of belonging, and these were highly regarded by those who accessed them. They centred around quality outdoor learning, leadership opportunities, holidays (including families), and mental health workshops. Thriving Communities worked efficiently alongside the **Intensive Family Support Service** when families needed more flexible and targeted support to help children remain at home. **Integrated neighbourhood teams** were closely aligned with the child poverty strategy and informed by lived experience. Staff, children, young people and parents we met all highly valued and praised these resources, recognising a tangible and positive impact.

Mothers experiencing domestic abuse received compassionate, sustained support from Women's Aid. **Compass** offered a well-integrated hub of services including NHS addictions, justice social work, advocacy, housing, and thriving communities. Peer practitioners with lived experience further provided a valuable, non-stigmatising and accessible resource.

Young carers

Identifying and effectively supporting young carers under the age of 18 was a priority for the community planning partnership. This remained an area of priority in the 2024-2029 Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

The number of young carers identified had increased over the last five years, with an **87%** increase from 602 in 2023/24 to 1126 in 2024/25.

South Ayrshire demonstrated strong practice by proactively identifying teeny carers (under fives), recognising and responding to early caregiving responsibilities. Funding was secured to support a two-year post to raise awareness and improve identification of teeny carers with colleagues and families.

The partnership had invested in a range of impactful awareness raising films, co-produced with, and featuring young carers, wee carers and teeny carers.

The partnership continued to invest extensively in young carers, to create opportunities, raise awareness and challenge stigma. Funding within the partnership, included £50K investment in residential and memory making days for wee carers; £15K to outdoor and adventure activities for young carers; and collaborations with local organisations including the Gaiety theatre, Ayr United football club, and Scottish Rowing.

Limited transport links and travel times meant that some services in the more populated north were more difficult to reach for those who lived in the more rural south. However, agile and solution-focused partnership working enabled staff to maintain flexible and responsive support for families. There was some variability in staff knowledge of third sector services, which at times limited the partnership's ability to make full and timely use of the wider support available. A few staff worked out with their usual hours on rare occasions, demonstrating personal commitment, but highlighting potential sustainability issues.

Almost all children and young people who responded to our survey said that they got all the help they needed some or all of the time. All parents agreed that the support they had received made their lives better and almost all agreed that the lives of their children had improved as a direct result of the support they received, endorsing partnership practice.

Support to stay safe

Staff were highly confident that they had the knowledge and skills to recognise and report child protection concerns. This was reflected in the partnership's initial response to concerns, which we assessed as mostly good or better. A co-located multi-disciplinary **initial response team** ensured concerns from various sources were appropriately assessed, allowing needs and required supports to be identified.

A high proportion of children subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home also had their names listed on the **Child Protection Register** or had been subject to **Inter-agency Referral Discussion (IRD)** within the last two years. Strong and established arrangements were in place through the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM). All children and young people subject to **Joint Investigative Interview** in South Ayrshire were interviewed under SCIM, ensuring a dedicated multi-agency response by a specialist team of social workers and police officers.

Referrals to the **Scottish Children's Reporter Administration** (SCRA) on both offence and non-offence grounds had reduced significantly over recent years, which the partnership attributed to effective early intervention, diversion from prosecution and the consistent, proportionate consideration of referrals.

All children and young people who completed our survey said they could identify a trusted adult they could speak to if they felt unsafe. Children and young people identified staff across a range of services that had helped them. Most reported feeling safe all or most of the time when online or using social media; at school; or at home. While the majority felt safe in the community, a few said they only felt safe some of the time. In the small number of records we read where concerns related to a child or young person being at risk arising from circumstances in the community, we assessed work as good or better, demonstrating appropriate intervention.

Community planning partners responded proactively to emerging concerns within the community through a range of well-coordinated initiatives, such as *Safer Shores*; an effective multi-agency approach combining transport safety, proactive beach

patrols and targeted youth engagement. **Campus Police Officers** made a notable contribution to keeping children and young people safer through strong early intervention work. Working collaboratively alongside staff in schools, Thriving Communities, and the local community, they supported young people through well-planned individual and group-based activities, successfully diverting antisocial behaviours from escalating further. The partnership continued to develop its approach to **contextual safeguarding** through their active engagement in national networks and local safeguarding arrangements.

There had been a marked reduction in the number of all young people in custody and on community payback orders. The effectiveness of support to reduce concerns related to children and young people being in conflict with the law was good or better in the majority of records we read, demonstrating positive practice. Non-offence grounds were used proportionately when they applied to mitigate the future impact offence grounds may have had on young people.

Support with health and wellbeing

Children and young people benefitted from comprehensive health assessments when they became 'looked after', which identified health needs and informed assessment and interventions. The majority of staff agreed that the wellbeing and life chances for those subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home were improving, reflecting optimism and positivity.

Most children and young people believed they had received the help they needed to improve both their mental and physical health, although staff perception was lower, indicating some disconnect in professional confidence around impact.

Where needed, children and young people received timely, targeted support for anxiety or emotional wellbeing difficulties from school nurses, education staff and family support workers trained in Let's Introduce Anxiety Management (**LIAM**). The **Exchange**, a highly regarded commissioned school counselling service, provided additional support. Some young people in the **Virtual School** benefited from health-focused sessions delivered collaboratively by **Thriving Communities Active Schools** programme and education welfare officers, increasing their knowledge and confidence.

Timely trauma recovery services were provided by Children 1st offering responsive support to children and young people who had been interviewed under SCIM, The **Family Nurse Partnership** maintained purposeful contact with families on their caseload at least fortnightly, enabling effective monitoring of infants and very young children. Health visitor contacts through the universal pathway enabled early identification of concerns, leading to increased referrals to support workers to help improve developmental outcomes.

Staff highlighted the need for more timely access to specialist mental health services, including the **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service** (CAMHS) was needed. Nevertheless, the percentage of children and young people commencing treatment within the standard of 18 weeks of referral to CAMHS had consistently met

the 90% standard over the last three years, demonstrating strong performance against national expectations.

An effectively functioning multi-agency screening group met fortnightly to review and co-ordinate support for children and young people with neurodevelopmental needs. A commissioned neurodevelopment service significantly reduced waiting times by assessing children and young people and in some cases, providing timely short-term intervention. The partnership recognised the need for more sustainable post-assessment supports and improved provision. A new multi-agency pathway had been introduced to ensure families received timely and appropriate support, though it was too early to assess its impact.

Learning and achieving

All school-aged care experienced young people were overseen by the Virtual School. In January 2026, half of all children and young people who were subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home were receiving support from the Virtual School and had an allocated welfare officer. This was having a strong and increasingly positive impact on attendance, attainment and exclusion rates. Most children and young people agreed that they had received help they needed with engagement at school. The Virtual School was creatively supporting children and young people to learn and achieve. Welfare officers were instrumental in helping children and young people get to school more regularly and access extra-curricular activities. The Virtual School had strong, embedded working relationships with other agencies, including Thriving Communities, social workers and campus police officers. This enabled support to extend well beyond school-based education, offering a joined-up model of support.

A comprehensive outcomes monitoring system effectively gathered data on care experienced children and young people, providing detailed analysis of attendance, achievements, exclusions and transitions from P.6 to S.2. Rigorous reviews of the data by the Virtual School headteacher enabled timely and targeted interventions and the allocation of additional support where needed.

Virtual School

The Virtual School effectively supported care experienced children, young people and their families to identify and address underlying barriers to school attendance. The range of support provided by the welfare officers was broad, covering all areas of wellbeing and financial inclusion. The Virtual School was highly valued by children, young people, parents and staff.

The Virtual School expanded the range of opportunities and experiences available to children and young people. Some of those included other family members, such as outdoor activities and residential weekends.

Led by the Virtual School, Routes into Skills Education (RISE) was created in 2025. This brought multi-agency teams together to support young people who may have otherwise been educated away from South Ayrshire. RISE focussed on the wider support needs of the young person, whilst providing a tailored curriculum at a pace to suit their needs, abilities and aspirations.

South Ayrshire's Skills Academy (SASKA) also sat under the Virtual School. Almost all young people who attended were care experienced and all gained qualifications.

The overall Virtual School provision had helped reduce school exclusion rates by over half.

The **attainment gap** for those subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home continued to narrow, with the strongest SQA results yet. While children and young people 'looked after at home' still required more help than children and young people 'looked after away from home' and those not subject to supervision orders, the gap was closing in South Ayrshire. Attendance, completion of modern apprenticeships and positive destinations for care experienced young people were above national averages, demonstrating strong local practice.

School attendance remained lowest for children and young people subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home. Secondary school attendance had improved by 4% in the last year. Educational psychology targeted support to care experienced learners, highlighting a needs-led approach. Care experience leads used data well and worked collaboratively to address trauma and reduce exclusions.

Sitting under the Virtual School, **RISE (Routes into Skills and Education)** offered a promising means of helping young people to re-engage with learning in their own communities and at their own pace. While still a recently introduced initiative, a few young people had been helped to achieve positive destinations. **South Ayrshire Skills Academy (SASKA)** provided an effective and impactful alternative learning pathway which transformed outcomes for some young people subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home.

Understanding and upholding children's rights

Leaders were clear that embedding the rights of children and young people was a priority. The UNCRC was prominent within strategic documents, and an improved understanding of rights was becoming systematically embedded across all services. Children and young people were supported to understand their rights. The majority reported that staff had explained their rights to them all or most of the time, with the remainder feeling this happened sometimes. Children's rights impact assessments were regularly and appropriately completed and reviewed, reinforcing a strong commitment to rights-based practice.

Care experience was treated as a protected characteristic and as such there were a wide range of inclusive supports on offer. Alongside school-term activities, engaging holiday programmes were available. Thriving Communities ran a well-attended and valued summer programme in 2025, with many care experienced young people among the attendees.

The Champions Board, youth council and Virtual School pupil council all had representation from children and young people who had been subject to a compulsory supervision order and living at home. The Champions Board led 46 youth work groups during 2025, and the youth council and Virtual School pupil council provided effective, empowering platforms for young people to express their views and challenge leaders. Elected members ensured Cabinet papers were discussed with the youth council in advance of meetings, demonstrating a genuine commitment to shared decision-making.

Key Line of enquiry 2

The services children and young people receive are well planned and delivered in a way which is compassionate and by staff who put children and young people at the heart of decision-making. People in the workforce ensure that children, young people, and parents are meaningfully listened to, heard, and included.

Assessing and managing risk and need

Children and young people living in South Ayrshire subject to a compulsory supervision order and living at home were cared for by a confident workforce who knew how to assess risk and need. Staff applied established frameworks to undertake assessments and manage risk, which informed strengths-based practice and enabled more effective support for families.

Staff felt well supported and had a clear understanding of the values and standards expected of them. Regular opportunities to discuss concerns with line managers contributed to a culture of professional assurance. Parents' views strongly reflected this confidence, with all reporting that their child was safer as a result of the support they received. Most also identified improvements in their own circumstances and in their child's broader wellbeing. We found that the effectiveness of intervention in meeting identified needs and risks was good or better in a high majority of the records we read.

The combined use of Safe and Together and Signs of Safety was enhancing how staff approached care planning, risk management and intervention across services. However, we agreed with the view of staff that their use of the models could have been more consistently captured in written records. Nevertheless, these models were beneficial in promoting transparency, partnership working and increased family involvement in safety planning.

Simultaneous child protection registration whilst the child or young person was subject to compulsory supervision orders and living at home was seen as a common and, in some respects, pragmatic practice. This was particularly the case when awaiting grounds of referral to be established. It also reflected the ongoing legal uncertainty before a substantive order was granted.

Some staff believed that child protection registration provided a greater sense of visibility and prioritisation, given the tighter review timescales and better-known procedures in child protection. While this rationale was understandable, the approach did not always lead to proportionate intervention or timely decision making around de-registration. There was limited shared understanding of the purpose and function of compulsory supervision orders, and how these should operate alongside child protection processes.

Assessments and Plans

Assessments were consistently up to date, and the majority were of good quality, although around one-quarter were only of an adequate standard. Most reflected a multiagency approach, demonstrating a commitment to maintaining rounded information about children and young people's circumstances.

The quality of plans, however, was more variable, with just over half evaluated as good or better. While most staff were confident in preparing outcome-focused plans and reported completing these in a timely manner, this was not always borne out in the records we reviewed. Although most plans were multi-agency, up to date, and clearly set out how needs, risks and concerns identified in assessments were to be addressed, inconsistency in quality indicated a need for further improvement.

Most children and young people told us they had been asked what help they needed and that they felt included in developing their plans. Our review of records confirmed that children and young people contributed their views to initial assessments, plans and reviews, and their views were consistently respected. This demonstrated a clear commitment to participation, though the quality of written plans did not always fully capture the richness of this engagement. Almost all parents contributed their views to assessments and plans and reported that their views were taken seriously and respected.

Although case notes showed effective relationships and collaboration, some assessments and plans lacked the clarity and sharpness expected. The partnership recognised the need to streamline these documents and ensure they were more focused, concise, and outcome-driven. This matters because strong relationships underpin the partnership's work. Unclear assessments and plans can reduce the effectiveness and consistency of support for children and families. This suggested a skills gap in translating some good direct practice into high-quality written assessments and plans. Nevertheless, staff knowledge of their local communities was a distinct strength, contributing effectively to joint working and enabling timely support.

Effective Intervention

Most records contained clear evidence of purposeful work to secure a stable and caring home environment. In almost all cases, referrals resulted in a service being provided, reflecting a responsive and well-connected system.

The majority of interventions were good or better, indicating that these children and young people experienced meaningful and timely support. However, notable variability remained, with over one-fifth rated as adequate and a small number weak. This indicated that children and young people did not consistently experience the quality of support expected. The partnership's own audit activity had identified similar variability, and leaders were taking steps to improve consistency. This reflected a mature and reflective improvement culture, although continued focus will be needed to ensure improvements translate into consistently stronger practice.

More than a quarter of children and young people whose records we read remained subject to a compulsory supervision order and living at home for longer than two years. Non-school attendance was identified as a concern for just over half of those children and young people and we found the support given to maintain attendance was good, or better in most cases. Some staff believed that children's hearings retained some young people on compulsory supervision orders at home longer than necessary and against the recommendation of the local authority. We were not confident that partners shared a common understanding about proportionality of the purpose and continued value of the supervision order.

Reviewing progress, joint planning and decision-making

Reviews were helping clear decision making and the majority were good or better in quality. However, timescales were frequently not met, meaning that some meetings did not take place as scheduled. This inconsistency limited the reliability of the review system in ensuring timely progress for children.

The partnership had itself identified, through case file audit, that concerns existed regarding the scheduling arrangements for children's reviews. Areas for improvement had been appropriately agreed, including the introduction of a more proactive early-notification system to support timely preparation. A review of scheduling processes was also underway to ensure consistent alignment with statutory timescales, particularly for interim compulsory supervision orders. These planned changes represent a constructive and necessary response to identified areas for improvement.

Most children, young people and almost all parents were invited to and included in reviews. Almost all parents understood decisions made, reflecting strong participation and clear communication, though a small number still felt insufficiently informed or included. This indicated isolated but important gaps in inclusive practice.

Information sharing

Information sharing arrangements were well established and generally effective. Key professionals routinely attended relevant meetings and contributed to risk assessment and planning decisions. AYRshare provided a reliable and up-to-date digital platform, facilitating timely and accurate information exchange across social work, health and education. There was strong evidence of cohesive multi-agency working, characterised by effective communication and sound professional relationships across children's and adult services. This supported more holistic and informed decision making.

Views, wishes and expectations of children and young people.

The voice of children, young people and families was identified as a continued strategic priority. Children and young people's voices were well embedded across the partnership, and they were increasingly shaping both practice and strategic developments. Parents described staff as kind, understanding and honest, qualities which enhanced engagement and supported trusting, effective relationships.

All children and young people who responded to our survey said they were treated with respect, and that staff listened to them all or most of the time, indicating strong relational practice. Almost all reported being asked what help they needed for things to improve, and most felt that staff explained decisions clearly, demonstrating growing consistency in child-centred communication. Children and young people were able to participate meaningfully in decisions about their lives. Their views were routinely gathered around meetings, with choice offered regarding meeting format, reinforcing a flexible and respectful approach.

Advocacy arrangements were strong and well implemented. Advocacy was reliably offered ahead of 'looked after' reviews and children's hearings. Some children and young people chose not to use advocacy because they felt confident to contribute independently; an indication of empowerment and self-advocacy skills. Advocacy workers ensured that children and young people's views were accurately represented and heard. The partnership had ensured inclusive advocacy was available for disabled children and young people, and Children's panel members had received baseline training in British Sign Language and Makaton, supporting more inclusive and accessible communication.

Promising practice was emerging around including and amplifying the infant voice. Play-based approaches were used effectively to gather the views of very young children. Health visitors integrated infant observations within universal health visiting pathway assessments, and family nurses continued to implement a well-established programme for listening to the views of infants and children under two. This represented innovative and thoughtful practice. The teeny carers initiative was a pioneering project, enabling the earliest possible identification of very young carers. This was complemented by the wee carers offer for primary-aged children, ensuring a comprehensive and tiered approach to supporting young carers.

Staff, children and parents we met consistently emphasised the central importance of strong, trusting relationships in achieving positive outcomes.

Embedding the promise

Embedding the promise saw purposeful language changes and the coproduction of documents and strategic plans.

At the request of children and young people, 'looked after child' review meetings were renamed to include the child or young person's own name, for example, "*Sam's meeting*." These developments helped to reduce stigma and demonstrated a clear commitment to ensuring services reflected the voices and experiences of children and young people.

The partnership brought corporate parents together and worked closely with the Champions Board, ensuring that children and young people with lived experience helped shape improvement. Through a collaborative process, the partnership, children, and young people jointly developed the **Parenting Promise**. This was further strengthened by coproduced digital resources, ensuring that the Parenting Promise was relevant and easily understood by children and young people across South Ayrshire.

The Signs of Safety approach enhanced participation, enabling clearer, strengths-based conversations through accessible language and manageable report formats. Safe and Together similarly enhanced participation in supporting children and young people affected by domestic abuse, contributing to more sensitive and inclusive practice.

Children 1st played a valuable and influential role in ensuring that children and young people meaningfully shaped future service design within the **Bairn's Hoose**. A dedicated group of young people contributed to developing questions and influencing the research approach, showcasing practice in youth-led design.

The partnership took its corporate parenting responsibilities seriously and staff at all levels were dedicated corporate parents, who understood their responsibilities. South Ayrshire's **corporate parenting plan**, the **Parenting Promise**, made a series of ambitious and meaningful commitments, including preventing school exclusion of care-experienced children, maintaining sibling relationships, and ensuring universal access to independent advocacy. These commitments applied to those who were in the local authority's care and lived at home with their parents, as well as those who did not. The partnership also committed to ensuring staff were skilled in trauma responsive practice.

Feedback and complaints

Mechanisms for gathering feedback and complaints were in place and functional, though opportunities remained to strengthen the consistency and depth of formal feedback collection. Children and young people were encouraged to provide feedback on their experiences of Children's Hearings, which was used appropriately to inform training of panel members and improvement activity. There were emerging examples of digital approaches, such as QR codes, being used to gather real-time views. The partnership had a clear and accessible complaints procedure, supported by a co-created child-friendly policy and guidance, reflecting a growing commitment to inclusive communication. There were positive indications that the partnership was actively striving to promote the participation and meaningful involvement of children, young people and families.

Key Line of enquiry 3

Leaders and managers work well together to create and maintain a joined-up system of care which delivers the right services to each child at the right time. This provides children and young people, their parents, and the workforce with help, support, and accountability.

Vision, values and aims

Central to the progressive work demonstrated by the partnership, is a consistent and well-articulated leadership approach that guides a shared vision, values and improvement.

The community planning partnership's strategic vision was clearly articulated and evidenced through the local outcomes improvement plan. There was strong and coherent alignment across strategic plans, demonstrating a well-coordinated approach. Staff agreed that leaders had a clear vision for the delivery and improvement of services for children and young people. **Health and social care partnership** (HSCP) staff valued their twice-yearly engagement sessions, which provided meaningful opportunities to review progress and reflect on shared values.

Leaders demonstrated strong commitment to collaborative working, underpinned by shared values and aims. Strategic direction was clearly aligned with both national strategies and local priorities, informed by meaningful engagement with children, young people and families. Plans were coherently linked across documents, helping staff maintain a consistent picture of the partnership's approach.

Staff valued the culture of collaboration across all agencies, including the third sector. Staff overall felt well supported by line managers, within a culture that actively encouraged professional curiosity and respected staff contributions. Staff expressed pride in the contribution they made to improving children's wellbeing. While most staff felt valued, a small minority were less certain, indicating pockets of inconsistency in staff experience within some areas of the partnership.

Recruitment, deployment and joint working

Maintaining workforce capacity in the context of significant budget savings remained an ongoing challenge. Nonetheless, a responsive workforce strategy was in place. While there had previously been recruitment difficulties in the south of the authority, workforce data and reports from leaders indicated that these issues were largely stabilising. Investment in training existing staff to become qualified social workers demonstrated a proactive and sustainable approach to workforce development. The majority of staff believed leaders ensured the necessary capacity to meet the needs of children and young people subject to compulsory supervision orders at home, although variances between services remained.

Leaders knew and understood the needs of children, young people and their families well and this was helping them to effectively target resources to the areas of greatest need. They were alert and responsive to the challenges experienced by families living in rural settings and they worked creatively to ensure equity of opportunity and access to services, despite some of the barriers associated with rural living.

Leadership of improvement and change

The partnership was ambitious and forward-looking in its approach to improving the quality and efficiency of services. Leaders were proactive in promoting the continuous improvement of children's services, using learning opportunities to drive change and secure better outcomes. They demonstrated a strong and sustained focus on improvement, supported by tight governance arrangements and a highly effective use of data. This enabled consistent monitoring and responsiveness to emerging needs. The Joint Improvement Group maintained effective oversight, using performance data and engagement with families to challenge variability and ensure continuous improvement across services.

The poverty strategy sat appropriately within the community planning partnership governance reporting structure; however, this was to be better aligned and fully integrated into the children's services planning partnership.

Guided by performance and outcomes data, the partnership recognised the need for whole systems change in response to shifting needs and financial pressures. Consultation with staff and with families were key components of change. Creative use of **Whole Family Wellbeing Funding** enabled commissioned research that informed the development of a promising and innovative whole-system, place-based model, **Radical Place Leadership**. This approach reduced institutional silos and demonstrated collaborative working with communities, ensuring that support was better aligned with people's needs.

This was still at an early stage of testing, having been piloted in Ayr North with four priority

Radical Place Leadership

Sponsored by key strategic leads, Radical Place Leadership was strengthening partnership working and fostering a culture of trust, empowerment, and shared accountability.

Consultation took place with Community Planning Partners, including communities. Four strategic priority workstreams were identified, reflecting the area's most persistent and complex challenges, confirmed through data and intelligence.

- People who were homeless or at risk
- Family poverty
- Children and young people not ready for school or work
- Drug and alcohol-related deaths

An Integrated Neighbourhood Team brought staff together from across the partnership to deliver on these priorities. Its work was driven by data, community insight, and lived experience.

The partnership recognised that significant resources were being directed toward a small number of families. The subsequent review to reduce duplication and improve coordination had the potential to deliver more effective, tailored interventions, while also improving efficiency.

workstreams. Informed by the same data, a new *healthy start* priority was appropriately added to the existing strategic priorities within the children and young people's services plan.

Sustaining services that deliver positive outcomes

Most staff felt optimistic and solution-focused about overcoming barriers to achieving the best outcomes. Leaders and partners were realistic about future budget pressures. A significant reduction in out-of-authority placements had generated substantial financial savings, which were reinvested to transform service delivery. This sustained focus had supported the development of impactful services such as the Virtual School, RISE and SASKA.

Positive outcomes were enhanced through localised decision-making. Small grants administered through the Champions Board empowered young people, enabling them to support their peers and access meaningful opportunities. The high uptake of grants by young people subject to compulsory supervision orders at home indicated strong engagement from this cohort. Although funding had reduced significantly for 2026, leaders were committed to reviewing and protecting this offer as far as possible.

Outcome-led initiatives were beginning to transform practice, particularly the Family First model, which was effective in identifying risk early and preventing escalation. The successful roll-out of Signs of Safety was welcomed by staff and had contributed to shared values and improved practice coherence. Training senior leaders alongside frontline staff was viewed positively, strengthening shared understanding and whole-system cultural alignment.

Oversight of multi-agency performance

There was credible evidence of ongoing review of performance targets. Efforts were being made to systematically identify information gaps, particularly in relation to promise data and performance information. The focus on implementing the promise was tenacious. Importantly, the **Parenting Promise** remained on track, with stretch targets appropriately carried forward. This was supported by a benefits tracker that provided transparent oversight to the **Corporate Parenting Executive Group**.

Strategic plans were publicly accessible, rights-based and firmly aligned with the promise. They were underpinned by robust **joint strategic needs assessments**, including a dedicated assessment for children and young people. These assessments provided evidence that promise work, Signs of Safety, the Virtual School, and Family First strengthened collaboration across services and contributed to a reduction in the number of looked-after children and young people. The children and young people's services plan had been independently reviewed, further validating the partnership's commitment to continuous improvement.

A comprehensive suite of data informed strategic planning, allowing leaders to identify emerging risks with accuracy. The partnership was also advancing efforts to include further data held by third-sector partners, reflecting a mature understanding

of data limitations and a commitment to improving cross-system intelligence.

The right strategic groups were in place to oversee performance, with mature performance measures that were regularly reviewed. Elected members scrutinised performance information and reports and they challenged leaders about what they were doing to improve, reinforcing democratic accountability.

While most staff believed that evaluation led to improvement, a small number were less certain, suggesting some inconsistencies in how learning was disseminated. Data sharing across services was strong, though some minor duplication persisted. Leaders were actively addressing this through investment in data analysis and improved information management systems. The partnership's use of neighbouring authorities for comparison, in addition to the local government benchmarking framework, was appropriate and pragmatic.

Involvement in service planning and development

Children and young people meaningfully influenced planning, policy and service development. One simple, but effective example was when the youth council recently challenged the affordability of some school lunches, facilities management listened to their concerns and agreed to review pricing and report back. This showed a rights-based, responsive and accountable approach.

The views of children and young people were clearly shaping language and approaches through a promise lens. The Champions Board and youth council were well regarded, providing highly influential mechanisms for young people to shape strategic decision-making. They played an integral role in informing leaders and elected members of lived experience, leading to tangible improvements. Elected members placed strong value on their direct engagement with care experienced young people, acknowledging their impact on decision-making.

Feedback was actively gathered and used to inform service delivery, and children and young people were informed about how their feedback shaped improvements. Commissioned research drew effectively on the participation of parents, and the findings helped shape strategic objectives. A self-evaluation by senior managers in November 2025 identified the need to further strengthen and systematise how feedback was gathered, indicating a mature and reflective improvement culture.

Workforce development and support

Staff felt skilled and confident in undertaking their duties competently. Although supervision frameworks existed, their application was inconsistently embedded. Line management support was generally accessible, but some variation in practice remained. More consistent managerial guidance could have helped staff achieve greater uniformity in the quality of assessments and plans.

Multi-agency training was widely recognised as beneficial, but access was variable across staff groups. Rurality was cited by staff as limiting access for some. While online training improved reach, it also reduced opportunities for networking and

relationship-building, which staff identified as important.

Strategic documents were honest and transparent about the challenges facing the partnership in delivering improvement and change. These included sustaining long-term investment, maintaining collaborative focus, navigating complex systems and ensuring continuity of leadership. Some services operated waiting lists, affecting timely support. However, multi-agency working mitigated these challenges and demonstrated effective use of joint resources.

Leaders recognised the need to strengthen communication with staff, although most staff reported that leaders were visible, communicative, and had a good understanding of the quality of frontline practice. This was not consistent across all agencies, indicating variability in leadership presence. Staff felt listened to and respected. The HSCP had developed a structured pathway to support staff into leadership roles and build capacity around leadership functions.

The partnership was demonstrating examples of how local and national evidence about effective practice shaped improvement. They were involved in driving elements of national improvement, such as work with young carers, the Virtual School and associated services.

Confidence statement

The Care Inspectorate and its scrutiny partners are confident that the partnership in South Ayrshire has the capacity to make changes to service delivery in the areas that require improvement and in which they can directly influence change. This is based on the following key points.

- Strong governance structures are already in place to enable change and the partnership has mature, functioning systems that can translate findings into improvement activity. The partnership adapts and improves, based on evidence.

- The partnership has a reflective, improvement-oriented and data-driven culture. This suggests that learning from this inspection will be implemented.

- Children, young people and families already influence change and that inclusivity is growing. The partnership has modified service design and practice, based on what they have heard from those with lived experience.

- South Ayrshire is deeply invested in delivering on the promise and is accountable for its delivery. The promise is becoming embedded structurally and culturally.

- The partnership has already identified some of the learning from this inspection and were planning and implementing further change before the inspection was announced. This provides confidence in a partnership that is self-aware, with live programmes of continuous improvement.

- Staff felt supported, confident and aligned with the vision, which are enabling conditions for delivering sustained change.

Next steps

The Care Inspectorate will request a joint action plan that details clearly how the partnership will make improvements in the key areas identified by inspectors. The partnership should consider the potential benefits of other improvement support to further embed self-evaluation activity and to ensure that they can continue to learn from other areas. Progress will be monitored and supported through the Care Inspectorate's link inspector arrangements.

Evaluations

We collected and reviewed evidence against all quality indicators in the framework to support the three key lines of enquiry. We use a six-point scale to provide formal evaluation of four quality indicators. A summary of these is provided below, along with a brief rationale.

Quality Indicator 2.1: Impact on children and young people.

We evaluate this quality indicator as **Very Good**

- Leaders placed priority on upholding the rights of children and young people. The UNCRC was prominently and consistently embedded within strategic documents, and rights-based practice was evident across services. Children and young people were actively supported to understand their rights, contributing to a strong culture of empowerment.

- Corporate parents demonstrated high ambition and aspiration, treating care experience as a protected characteristic in a meaningful way. This approach brought benefits, including prioritised access to modern apprenticeships, financial support, and enhanced opportunities for inclusion.

- Most children and young people believed they had received the help they needed to improve their mental and physical health, although staff perception was more cautious, indicating a possible gap in confidence or awareness of impact. Even so, the experiences of children and young people reflected positive progress.

- Care experienced children and young people were supported to take part in a broad and enriching range of learning opportunities. Educational attainment continued to improve, and young people were being effectively supported into positive destinations.

- Staff were creative, agile and solution focused in the ways they supported children and young people, demonstrating a high level of professional commitment.

- Almost all children and young people had valuable opportunities to develop a relationship with a key member of staff, an important protective and stabilising factor.

- All children and young people who required it received support to nurture relationships with peers, and almost all received appropriate and timely support to strengthen relationships with family members.

- All children and young people reported having an adult they could speak to if they did not feel safe, which is a strong indicator of trust and relational security. All parents agreed that their children were safer because of the support they received.

- Children and young people in conflict with the law were well supported, with targeted and proportionate interventions that helped to effectively divert them from prosecution and the adult justice system.

Quality Indicator 5.3: Care planning, managing risk and effective intervention.

We evaluate this quality indicator as **Good**

- All children and young people had an up-to-date assessment that considered their needs, wellbeing concerns and risks. Almost all assessments were multi-agency, and a high majority were of good or better quality.

- Almost all children and young people were provided with the opportunity to have a health assessment, which identified health needs and informed assessment and interventions. Most were of good quality, reflecting strong operational compliance with statutory expectations.

- Almost all children and young people referred for support, received a service, evidencing a responsive and well-connected partnership.

- The quality of plans for children and young people was inconsistent. Strengths in assessment and practice were not always translated clearly into effective planning.

- The partnership's approach to early intervention was positively influencing outcomes, helping to prevent needs from escalating and ensuring children and young people received timely support.

- All interventions were effective for at least the majority of children and young people, indicating a generally strong baseline, but also scope for improvement.

- 'Looked after' reviews occurred in almost all cases, and the majority were well chaired, with records showing progress and challenge. However, timescales were often missed, leading to delayed meetings. This inconsistency reduced the reliability of the review system in ensuring timely progress.

- There was a limited shared understanding across the wider partnership of the purpose and function of compulsory supervision orders, and how these should operate alongside child protection processes.

Quality Indicator 5.4: Involving individual children, young people, and families.

We evaluate this quality indicator as **Very Good**

- Children and young people were treated with respect, and staff listened to them carefully. Most had meaningful opportunities to contribute their views to assessments and plans, and most contributed to their reviews. Their views on decisions were clearly respected, reflecting a strong culture of participation.

- All parents contributed their views to assessments and almost all to plans, with their perspectives appropriately considered in decision-making.

- Advocacy arrangements were strong and reliably implemented, with advocacy offered ahead of 'looked after' reviews and children's hearings.

- Almost all children and young people had access to someone who could help them express their views, a significant indicator of equitable and inclusive practice.

- All parents and almost all children had opportunities to build a relationship with a key member of staff, resulting in strengthened continuity and trust.

- Almost all parents believed their child had received the right help to maintain loving and supportive relationships, evidencing strong relational practice.

- Children, young people and parents were asked for their views on how and where review meetings should happen, and almost all were involved. Parents were increasingly encouraged to chair or co-chair these meetings, promoting a more empowering and inclusive approach.

- All parents agreed that the support they received made their lives better, and almost all agreed their children's lives had also improved - strong indicators of positive impact.

- Although clear mechanisms for feedback and complaints were in place, there remained scope to further strengthen the breadth and consistency of formal feedback collection to ensure all voices are systematically captured.

QI 9.2: The leadership of strategy and direction.

We evaluate this quality indicator as **Very Good**

- Leaders demonstrated a strong, coherent and sustained commitment to collaborative working, underpinned by shared values and a clear vision for improvement.
- Priorities were well aligned with national strategies and local needs, informed by active engagement with children, young people and families.
- The Champions Board played an influential role in advising leaders and shaping improvements based on lived experience. Both the Champions Board and the youth council were well regarded by senior leaders and elected members, who valued them as key strategic voices.
- Strategic priorities were informed by a diverse dataset, strengthened further by engagement with children, young people and families. Evidence of ongoing review and monitoring demonstrated leaders' commitment to continuous improvement.
- Leaders maintained a strong and sustained focus on improvement. Well established governance arrangements supported consistent monitoring, effective oversight and responsiveness to emerging need.
- Leaders recognised the need for whole-systems change and service redesign in response to changing needs and financial pressures. Impactful programmes were beginning to transform children's services.
- Leaders demonstrated a strong understanding of the needs of children, young people and families, enabling them to target resources effectively.

Appendix 1: Summary of inspection activities

During the joint inspection we gathered evidence from a wide range of sources. This included:

Surveys

- We carried out a staff survey and received 304 responses from staff who worked in a range of services.

Meetings with children, young people, and families

- We listened to the views and experiences of 90 children and young people and 27 parents and carers. This included face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations and survey responses.

Review of written information

- We reviewed the initial information document, along with the initial 145 pieces of submitted written evidence. In addition to that we received and reviewed an additional 25 documents during the inspection. We also viewed a range of submitted videos.

Young inspection volunteer research

- Young inspection volunteers undertook some research to see what information, support or advice they could find for children and young people online and through social media around areas such as voice, health, education, money, drug and alcohol issues, support to young people in conflict with the law, and housing. They also looked at key strategic plans, such as the Parenting Promise, and reviewed how accessible they were to children and young people. They looked at whether children and young people were clearly involved in the development of plans.

Review of children's records

- We reviewed the multi-agency records of 60 children and young people who had been subject to compulsory supervision orders while living at home with their parents over the past two years.

Meetings with staff and leaders

- We met with 238 members staff including senior leaders and those who worked directly with children, young people and families.

- We met with five elected members.

We are grateful to everyone who spoke to us as part of this inspection.

Appendix 2: Area specific glossary

A full glossary of the terms that we use in our reports can be found here.

Additional terms that we use in this report are listed below.

Peep Learning Together Programme	This is an evidence-based programme that supports the home learning environment. It helps parents and carers make the most of the learning and play opportunities in everyday life, so that children become confident communicators and learners.
Togetherness	These are learning pathways designed to enhance children's and families' emotional health and well-being. Parents can learn about their child's development and build their confidence in parenting.
Family First forums	Family First is a joint approach between HSCP, education and other agencies and is designed to support the aspirations of the promise and the ambition that children and young people in South Ayrshire Grow Well, Live Well and Age Well. Forums support young people who are at risk of exclusion, at key points of transition or have poor levels of school attendance. It is based on the 10 Principles of Intensive Family Support, helping families with their health, wellbeing, family relationships.
Young carers	A young carer is anyone under the age of 18 who helps to support someone. This can be a relative, friend or neighbour and they don't have to live in the same home.
Compass	Compass aims to remove barriers to accessing support for people affected by alcohol and drugs use, including those recently released from prison or hospital, or who have experienced a recent near fatal overdose. The service provided peer-based support, harm reduction advice and information, advocacy, and an element of coordination of support to help engage with services.
Virtual school	The Virtual School works with care experienced families and young people to address issues which may be preventing them from regularly attending school. It helps to identify underlying causes of attendance issues and provide support to manage these issues. The Virtual School supports young people to establish routines in school, to achieve core qualifications, and in difficult periods of transition. It also supports young people in their communities to make positive peer

	relations, have the same opportunities and experiences as their peers, and championing their rights.
RISE (Routes into Skills and Education)	Rise is part of the Virtual School team and supports pupils who have been assessed as requiring education from highly specialist placements. The pupils have been previously supported through a range of universal and targeted interventions and high levels of support from multi-disciplinary teams.
South Ayrshire Skills Academy (SASKA)	SASKA creates a nurturing, respectful, and trusting learning environment where young people feel valued and supported. The programme aims to help learners achieve success, develop confidence, and build the skills required for positive destinations, with a strong emphasis on personal development, employability, and lifelong learning. Staff work with multi-agencies to ensure the most supportive plan is in place to gain qualifications and pathways to positive destinations for young people.
Radical Place Leadership	This approach is concerned with shifting power closer to communities and organising service delivery to focus on the support people really need, rather than organisational need and traditionally deliver. There is a focus on cultural change and long-term sustainability.
Corporate Parenting Executive Group	The corporate parenting executive group functions as the corporate parenting group, which has responsibility for the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Plan.
Parenting Promise	South Ayrshire's Parenting Promise is a plan for those who are care experienced and details what they can expect of their corporate parents.
Integrated neighbourhood teams	The integrated neighbourhood teams model is a whole system, place-based approach to delivering health and social care services, stemming from the Radical Place Leadership approach. This relationship-based way of working aims to reduce duplication in families lives in terms of the services who support them.
Intensive Family Support Service	The Intensive Family Support Service work with families who need a specific, targeted, and short-term intensive intervention to get back on track. The team will provide support for a set period, checking in regularly to ensure progress is monitored. The team help families work on making positive changes that last, build capacity and strengthen family skills through enhancing family

	relationships; supporting new routines and boundaries; improving home environments; enhancing parenting skills, building confidence; and connecting to local communities and networks.
Initial Response Team	The Initial Response Team is a central point for all concerns about children and young people. The service aims to get children and families help when they need it. A same day response will always be provided for children where there are child protection concerns.
Thriving Communities Active Schools	**Thriving Communities Active Schools** aims to provide more and higher quality opportunities for children to participate in school sport and to increase capacity through the recruitment of volunteers who deliver the activity sessions.
The Exchange	The Exchange Provides psychological support for children aged 5-12, helping them build resilience through collaboration with schools and parents.
Thriving Communities	Thriving Communities is South Ayrshire Council's service responsible for delivering Health and Wellbeing, Community Learning and Development (CLD), Community Safety and Employability. The service operates across South Ayrshire and has established thematic and locality-based teams that support community planning priorities.

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