



# Key question 7 for mainstream boarding schools and school hostels

March 2024

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**Keeping The Promise at  
the heart of what we do**

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## Our approach to inspection of mainstream boarding schools and school hostels

We are committed to continually reviewing and developing our approaches to scrutiny. Since the introduction of the Health and Social Care Standards we have been developing new approaches to scrutiny. This has included our range of quality frameworks. The primary purpose of a quality framework is to support services to evaluate their own performance. Inspectors then use the same framework to provide independent assurance about the quality of care and support. By setting out what we expect to see in high-quality care and support provision, we can also help support improvement. Using a framework in this way develops a shared understanding of what constitutes good care and support. It also supports openness and transparency in the inspection process.

We want to make sure that inspections and our other scrutiny work are strongly focused on assessing the extent to which people experience wellbeing, and on understanding the difference care and support makes to their lives.

**The Promise** is the work of change that intends to strengthen Scotland's care system to become more caring and collaborative. It outlines the belief that, to do this, children's services across Scotland need to transform. This process of transformation must be built on the experiences, views and voices of children and young people at its core.

As part of our commitment to keeping The Promise, we developed key question 7 for mainstream boarding schools and school hostels. Key question 7 is designed to:

- produce a proportionate regulatory footprint, affording services space to focus on development.
- prioritise the quality of relationships experienced by children, not the process surrounding their care.
- support engagement with more children and young people, through visiting more services. In our discussions with young people about this revised approach, this was deemed to be particularly important to them.

Our children and young people's inspection teams began using key question 7 in April 2022. During the summer of 2023, we reviewed key question 7 with inspectors, young people who experience or have experienced care and providers to evaluate the impact it was having and how well it was supporting the sector to self-evaluate its own performance. We have made some changes as a result of this review and agreed that we will continue to use key question 7 for inspections from April 2024 onwards.

Each key question 7 augments its corresponding quality framework on our [website](#).

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## How can key question 7 be used by care services?

Key question 7 focuses on the key aspects of the quality framework that contribute to the outcomes of The Promise. While key question 7 can be used as a self-evaluation tool, services should continue to use the full framework document, particularly if you are looking at issues in more detail.

We will work with care services and sector-wide bodies to build the capacity for self-evaluation, based on key question 7 and the framework. Self-evaluation is a core part of assuring quality and supporting improvement. The process of self-evaluation, as part of a wider quality assurance approach, requires a cycle of activity based around three questions:

- **How are we doing?**

This is the key to knowing whether you are doing the right things and that, as a result, people are experiencing high quality, safe and compassionate care and support that meets their needs, rights and choices.

- **How do we know?**

Answering the question 'how we are doing?' must be done based on robust evidence. The quality indicators in this document, along with the views of people experiencing care and support and their carers can help you to evaluate how you are doing. You should also take into account performance data collected nationally or by your service.

- **What are we going to do now?**

Understanding how well your service is performing should help you see what is working well and what needs to be improved. From that, you should be able to develop plans for improvement based on effective practice, guidance, research, testing and available improvement support.

Using key question 7 and the framework can help provide an effective structure around self-evaluation. This diagram below summarises the approach.



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Irrespective of our role as the national scrutiny and improvement body, care providers will want to satisfy themselves, their stakeholders, funders, boards and committees that they are providing high quality services. We believe this quality framework is a helpful way of supporting care and support services to assess their performance and make improvements as part their own quality assurance. We are promoting this approach as we believe it adds value, and we consider it important that care and support providers do not take actions merely to satisfy the inspection process.

## How can key question 7 be used by care services?

Key question 7 is comprised of a single key question with two quality indicators. The key question is **'How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing?'** and the quality indicators are:

- 7.1 Children and young people are safe, experience warmth, compassion and get the most out of life.
- 7.2 Leaders and staff have the capacity and resources to meet and champion children and young people's needs and rights.

Each quality indicator has a small number of key areas, short bullet points, which make clear the areas of practice covered. Under each quality indicator, we have provided quality illustrations of these key areas at two levels on [the six-point scale used in inspections](#). The illustrations are the link to The Promise, good practice guidance and the Health and Social Care Standards and are drawn from the expectations set out in these. They describe what we might expect to see in a care service that is operating at a 'very good' level of quality, and what we might see in a service that is operating at a 'weak' level of quality. These illustrations are not a definitive description of care and support provision but are designed to help care services and inspectors evaluate performance against the quality indicators.

In line with our commitment to keeping The Promise, we have reviewed the illustrations to ensure they demonstrate what is important to children and young people, are outcome-focused and promote the highest standards of care and support.

In each quality indicator, we have included a scrutiny and improvement toolbox. This includes examples of the scrutiny actions that we may use in evaluating the quality of provision and links to key practice documents. This toolbox will also support self-evaluation and help care services in their own improvement journey.

Inspectors will always look at 7.1 and will also look at 7.2 in some services depending on the current evaluations (grades) for the service, the intelligence we hold about the service and risk factors that we may identify.

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We will use the quality illustrations in our professional evaluations of the care and support we see. We will provide an overall evaluation for each of the quality indicators we inspect, using the **six-point scale**, from 'unsatisfactory' (1) to 'excellent' (6).

Where we inspect one quality indicator, the evaluation for that quality indicator will be the evaluation for the key question overall. Where we inspect more than one quality indicator per key question, the overall evaluation for the key question will be the lowest evaluation of the quality indicators for that specific key question. This recognises that there is a key element of practice that makes the overall key question no better than this evaluation.

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## Core assurance checklist

Experience has taught us that when things go wrong in care services, they often relate to key areas. Theory and inquiries into when care goes wrong has highlighted the areas that are important to monitor because these can be identified as early indicators of concern to people using services (Scottish Government 2014, Hull University 2012, Francis Report 2013, Wardhaugh and Wilding 1993). These are the key areas considered during the registration process, and policies and procedures relating to them must be in place before a service is registered. Because we know, and research tells us, that these key areas are essential to a service being safe, we have called them 'core assurances'.

This checklist of core assurances highlights what inspectors must look at in the course of an inspection. They help guide providers on the areas that are important to people's safety and wellbeing as well as identifying any potential risks to outcomes for children and young people. This is because children and young people's rights to be safe and have good outcomes must be consistent, planned and embedded. We know that quality inputs and processes are a key driver for good outcomes and minimising the risks to poor outcomes, which is why we examine these core assurances at every inspection. Our focus is on the effectiveness of these in delivering good outcomes and minimising the risk of poor outcomes.

The core assurances span the entire framework, covering elements of several different quality indicators. If we have any concerns arising from our assessment of a particular core assurance, we may also decide to evaluate quality indicator 7.2 if this is not already being evaluated. We may also decide to look at a specific quality indicator from the full framework.

In making our evaluations we will make every effort to obtain the views of children and young people who live in the service, families, staff, visiting professionals and relevant stakeholders.

### General

- A registration certificate is on display and contains accurate information that reflects the service currently being delivered.
- A valid insurance certificate is either displayed or readily available (except local authority services).

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## Protection

- There is a child protection policy and procedure that evidences how people are kept safe.
- Staff are trained in child protection and are confident in knowing when and how to make referrals, including notifying the Care Inspectorate.
- Where required, there is evidence that appropriate child protection referrals have been made and followed up.

## Infection prevention and control

- All staff have an understanding of infection prevention and control, including the importance of regular handwashing, which contributes to a safe and hygienic environment for children and young people.
- The service has governance and quality assurance processes in place for infection prevention and control. This includes regular training in key areas such as infection prevention and control and food hygiene where appropriate.
- Leaders ensure that staff have access to suitable equipment and appropriate cleaning products where needed.

## Medication system and records

- Children and young people are protected by safe medication management policies and practices. This includes regular audits and accurate tracking of children and young people's medication.
- Legislation and good practice guidance are followed when supporting children and young people who do not have capacity to take medication, where children and young people are managing their own medication and when 'as required' medication is prescribed.
- Where there are medication errors, services make appropriate notifications and learn from these to improve medication practice. This is supported by regular training and development opportunities for staff.

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## Management of people's finances

- Children and young people's personal property and finances are supervised and protected.
- Clear financial policies and procedures for the management of children and young people's money and possessions are documented and evidenced in practice.

## Accident/incident records

- A clear record of all accidents and incidents involving children and young people occurring in the service is maintained and, where required, notified to the Care Inspectorate and/or the appropriate agency or authority. There are quality assurance processes around accident and incidents and evidence of learning from these.

## Development/Improvement plan

- There is an up-to-date development/improvement plan in place that is informed by feedback from staff and children and young people who use the service and their relatives or people who are important to them. This plan is actively used to drive improvement in the service.

## Complaints

- The complaints and concerns of each child or young person, their family, advocate or representative and visitors are listened to and acted upon and there is an effective appeals procedure.
- People are made aware promptly of the outcome of any complaints and there are processes in place to implement learning from complaints. A record is made of all complaints, responses and outcomes and details of any formal investigations undertaken.
- The complaints process is accessible and easy for people to use. It can easily be understood by children and young people using the service.

## Staff recruitment procedures

- Safe and effective recruitment practices are in place to recruit staff in accordance with good practice and national safer recruitment guidance.

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## The physical environment

- The service is clean, tidy, welcoming and free from avoidable and intrusive noise and smells. The layout of the setting and quality of the furnishings and fixtures is nurturing and meets children and young people's needs and outcomes.

## Maintenance records for safety equipment

- Equipment necessary to the safe operation of the service is well-maintained in line with the manufacturer's instructions and any other relevant legislation.
- Staff and children and young people are aware of emergency procedures, including where evacuation is required.
- Where specialist equipment is needed, there is a process for ensuring this is properly installed and remains safe through appropriate testing and servicing.

## Planned care and support

- The child or young person's personal plan is outcome-focused and based on an ongoing comprehensive assessment of individual needs and strengths. It is implemented, evaluated and reviewed, reflects the child or young person's changing needs and outlines the support required to maximise their quality of life in accordance with their wishes.
- Children and young people are actively involved in their personal planning process and care is person-centred and delivered in accordance with each child or young person's individual plan.
- Personal plans are accessible to children and young people and the staff providing their care and support, ensuring their needs and wishes are met.

## Management oversight and governance

- There are governance and oversight systems in place to identify risks and ensure appropriate action is taken to improve outcomes for children and young people. These include leaders' behaviours which create the right environment for safe quality care.
- There are internal and external quality assurance systems such as managers and boards of governors in place to promote high-quality care and support.

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## Meaningful connections

- Children and young people are actively supported with physical meetings, visits and digital and/or traditional forms of communication to maintain social and community connections. This includes staying connected with families and other people important to children and young people.
- Staff demonstrate they understand and apply the principles of sustaining meaningful relationships in children and young people's lives and how to support them with this.
- Practice is strengthened by a policy which outlines how children and young people will be supported to keep in touch with people who are important to them.

## The quality indicator framework

<b>Key question 7: How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing?</b>	
<b>7.1.</b> Children and young people are safe, experience warmth, compassion and get the most out of life.	<b>7.2.</b> Leaders and staff have the capacity and resources to meet and champion children and young people's needs and rights.

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## Key question 7: How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing?

**This key question has two quality indicators associated with it.**

They are:

- 7.1 Children and young people are safe, experience warmth, compassion and get the most out of life.
- 7.2 Leaders and staff have the capacity and resources to meet and champion children and young people's needs and rights.

# Quality indicator 7.1: Children and young people are safe, experience warmth, compassion and get the most out of life

Key areas include the extent to which:

- feel safe and are protected from harm
- feel valued and their views, wishes and rights are of utmost importance to everyone
- have their aspirations met and can reach their potential.

## Quality illustrations

Very good	Weak
<p>Children and young people feel, and are kept, safe - both emotionally and physically. This is because they benefit from knowledgeable staff who understand their needs. These staff work with other agencies and confidently use preventive, risk assessed, practice. Guardianship arrangements, when these are provided by the school, are well managed and supported.</p> <p>The service fully implements national guidance and best practice in child protection, including child sexual exploitation.</p> <p>Children and young people experience therapeutic and stable care. They have a trusted adult they can turn to for support. Personal plans are dynamic and reflect children and young people’s evolving needs.</p>	<p>The extent to which children and young people are protected from harm is compromised. Safe care practice is reactive. Staff do not consistently identify indicators of concern and strategies to manage risk are ineffective. There is insufficient collaboration with relevant external partners. Guardianship arrangements, when these are provided by the school, lack oversight and support.</p> <p>Networks of support outside the school are limited and do not provide the safeguards required.</p> <p>Children and young people do not have a trusted adult they can seek support from. Care practices and supporting documentation are not responsive to children and young people’s evolving needs.</p>

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Children and young people are confident that staff will effectively challenge all forms of bullying. Children and young people with additional support needs or whose first language is not English are given all the support they need to thrive.

Children and young people may not feel safe, and experience being bullied, feeling threatened, afraid or isolated. Their wellbeing is affected by insensitive responses to their concerns. Children with additional support needs or whose first language is not English do not get the help they need to thrive.

Children and young people enjoy warm, trusting and nurturing relationships with those caring for them. They are based on compassion and a full understanding of children and young people's needs, wishes and choices.

Children and young people feel unsupported and do not believe they are valued or understood by the people looking after them.

Children and young people experience a high level of respect from everyone involved in looking after them. This respect is also reflected in the quality of environment and the resources available for young people.

Children and young people are not respected as the accommodation, facilities and resources do not reflect their needs, wishes and choices.

Children and young people are fully engaged in their care and support. They can participate meaningfully and easily in decisions affecting them.

There are limited opportunities for children and young people to express themselves or have their voices heard. Where children and young people's views are provided, these are not listened to or used to support the development of the service.

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Children and young people get the most out of life because their mental and physical health needs are promptly and comprehensively met.

Young people benefit from a tasty, varied, and well-balanced diet that promotes health and well-being. Children and young people enjoy the food available and opportunities are provided to promote the social aspects of eating.

Children and young people's individual ambitions, interests and life skills are consistently supported and developed. They have opportunities to contribute to society and support their holistic development.

Children and young people receive individually tailored support to participate fully in learning and maximise attainment and attendance.

Children and young people's physical and mental health is not given sufficient attention.

Children and young people are unhappy with the variety and quality of food available. Opportunities to enjoy the social aspects of eating are limited and mealtimes do not support children and young people's overall wellbeing.

Care practices and activities are institutionalised, repetitive and limited to, or aimed at, groups. There is a lack of imagination in the opportunities that young people could and should participate in.

Children and young people are disadvantaged because there is limited ambition or support to build on their individual strengths and develop skills.

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# Scrutiny improvement and support toolbox

## Key improvement resources

Key improvement resources are available on [The Hub](#)

## Scrutiny and improvement support actions

### Observation of:

- staff practice
- interactions and communication with children and young people
- the experiences of children and young people.

### Discussions with:

- people using the service
- relatives, friends and carers of people using the service, including guardians
- key professionals and other stakeholders
- staff.

### Sampling of:

- personal plans (tracking children and young people's experiences)
- service training plan and records
- complaints received by the service
- records relating to the physical environment
- infection prevention and control records
- protection issues and practice frameworks including the child protection policy
- accident/incident records.

### Consideration of:

- guardianship arrangements
- how the physical environment meets children and young people's needs
- mealtimes and how an enjoyable, social experience for children and young people is promoted
- how children and young people are supported to be involved in the community and engage in activities/hobbies that they enjoy
- how personal plans are informing care and evidencing changes in children and young people's needs, wishes and choices
- processes in place to support children and young people to keep in touch with those important to them and to engage in their community
- how the service has sought and responded to feedback.

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## Quality indicator 7.2: Leaders and staff have the capacity and resources to meet and champion children and young people’s needs and rights

Key areas include the extent to which:

- leaders and staff are confident in their practice and are well supported
- staffing levels and skills are right to meet the needs and rights of young people
- self-evaluation and quality assurance maintain safe care and young people’s rights. They drive improvement in every aspect of children and young people’s lives.

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### Quality illustrations

Very good	Weak
<p>Leaders ensure the culture is inspiring, supportive, and empowering. They model high standards of practice and successfully achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people.</p> <p>External managers and governing boards are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They play a key role as champions for children and young people and in monitoring the quality of their experiences. They contribute to ensuring the safety of children and young people and improving their experiences and outcomes.</p>	<p>The vision for the service lacks clarity and is not sufficiently focussed on children and young people’s rights. Leadership lacks the necessary stability, energy, or direction.</p> <p>External managers do not provide an effective contribution to the safety of children and young people. They do not contribute to the school’s improvement agenda. This means that experiences for children and young people are of poor quality.</p>

There is always the right number of staff, who have the right skills and experience, available to care for children and young people. They are effectively deployed to ensure the needs of children and young people are always met. The staff team is stable, which allows young people to develop and enjoy secure and trusting relationships.

Risk is well understood and managed effectively to help keep children and young people safe.

The numbers of staff deployed at any one time is not responsive enough to meet children and young people's needs all the time. There is a lack of consistency and continuity which limits children and young people's ability to build trusting relationships.

Risks are not understood, anticipated, or responded to effectively. Risk is not managed well as staff may not fully understand their role in keeping children and young people safe.

Staff are consistently safely recruited and appropriately registered. Everyone is individually equipped and supported to successfully meet all the needs of the children and young people.

Staff confidently deliver the best quality support and care. Effective training, support and supervision underpin this.

Safer recruitment practices are not followed. Staff lack the knowledge, experience and skills to meet all the needs of the children and young people.

Children and young people do not benefit from high quality support. Training and supports for staff are ineffective. As a result, the quality of children and young people's experiences is compromised.

There is continuous, robust evaluation of children and young people outcomes, experiences, and their setting. This ensures they receive the best possible care and support in high-quality surroundings.

There are some systems in place to monitor aspects of service delivery, and the quality of the setting, but they are largely ineffective. The ability of the service to support children and young people is impacted by this.

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# Scrutiny improvement and support toolbox

## Key improvement resources

Key improvement resources are available on [The Hub](#).

## Scrutiny and improvement support actions

### Observation of:

- staff practice
- interactions and communication with children and young people
- the experiences of children and young people.

### Discussions with:

- people using the service
- relatives, friends and carers of children and young people using the service
- key professionals and other stakeholders
- staff.

### Sampling of:

- development plan/improvement plan, including how this is driving improvement
- personal plans (tracking children and young people's experiences)
- staff recruitment procedures and records
- service induction and training plan and records
- staff rotas and tools for assessing staffing
- accident/incident records.

### Consideration of:

- management oversight and governance of risk
- the analysis of staff skills required to meet the outcomes of those using the service
- how induction is tailored to staff that are new to the service
- how children and young people, or where appropriate, relatives, and carers can be involved in the recruitment process
- how information in personal plans informs staffing
- how leaders monitor staffing levels and skill mix, and when adjustments are made.

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