

The year in review

2018 - 2019

Strategic objective

Key activities



Children's wellbeing and digital children

We were concerned about how children's data was being used online without their knowledge. In November, we published 'Who Knows What About Me?' which looked at how vast amounts of children's data is collected as children grow up. The report made a number of recommendations around strengthening data protection laws, transparency around algorithms and called for companies producing apps and toys to inform parents and children that data would be tracked.

This year we wanted to make social media companies more accountable for harm experienced by children on their platforms, so we worked with the law firm Schillings to publish a draft statutory duty of care law. This work has impacted on the Government's Online Harms White Paper.

We know children are spending longer online from a younger age but physical play remains a critical part of childhood. Our report 'Playing Out' recommended making children's play a public health priority and providing more funding for holiday play schemes.



Children in care

We often hear from children who are being forced to move from their care placement when they don't want to, so our Stability Index charts improvements or declines in stability in the care system. This year we have given detailed reports to 78 local areas to help them understand how well they're doing compared to other areas, and which groups of children to focus on supporting more. The Stability Index also provides data for the DfE's National Stability Forum for looked after children.

We provide representation and advice to children in care and care leavers through our Help at Hand service. This year the service received over 1,200 enquiries. A quarter of those are about care planning, transitions at 18 and care leavers' rights. Issues around homelessness and housing are frequently raised along with resettlement from a custodial sentence and immigration status.

We wanted to provide a positive online meeting place for children in the care system. Our digital platform, IMO ('in my opinion') went live last summer. By April 2019 it was receiving over 7,000 views per month and had amassed a social media following of 1,700. Supported by generous donations from, among others, the BBC, Google, Headspace, Audible and Scott Cinemas, IMO offers opportunities, experiences and gifts to support the social and emotional wellbeing of children in care and care leavers but more importantly, it's a way for them to make themselves heard.



Children behind closed doors

During regular visits to children living in institutions like secure training centres and hospitals we became concerned about the use of restraint and segregation. Our report looking at the use of segregation in youth custody showed an increase in the number of episodes even as the overall number of children detained has fallen. We revealed the average length of period of detention has doubled from 8 to 16 days.

In response to shocking stories of children with learning disabilities being locked up in hospitals, in May we published 'Far less than they deserve', a report showing how too many children are being admitted to secure hospitals unnecessarily – in some cases spending months and years of their childhood in institutions far from home, instead of in the community.

Far too little is known about children in secure institutions in England. Our report 'Who are they? Where are they?' gathered together for the first time all the data available about children who are locked up. We found there are 1,465 children in England securely detained and that the government are spending around £300m a year on holding them. There are over 200 children locked away but whose whereabouts in the system are 'invisible'.