

Inspections of safeguarding and looked after children services

Framework for inspection and guidance for local authorities and partners

This document sets out the framework and guidance for the inspections of safeguarding and looked after children. It should be read alongside the accompanying framework and guidance for the unannounced inspections of contact, assessment and referral arrangements for children and young people in need and children and young people who may be in need of protection.

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Introduction

1. This document sets out the framework and guidance for the inspections of safeguarding and looked after children. It should be read alongside the accompanying framework and guidance for the unannounced inspections of contact, assessment and referral arrangements for children and young people in need and children and young people who may be in need of protection.¹
2. These inspections focus on evaluating outcomes for children and young people and the impact that practice and services have on improving outcomes, including through managing risk and minimising incidence of child abuse and neglect. The programme of inspections of safeguarding and looked after children services and outcomes will be carried out by suitably experienced inspectors from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. In some cases, inspectors from other inspectorates and commissions such as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary may assist in carrying out the inspections.
3. These inspections will contribute to Ofsted's annual reviews of the performance of each local authority's children's services functions and will be taken into account in Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's statutory annual performance rating for each authority. They do not preclude other inspections of safeguarding and services for looked after children where HMCI judges it appropriate.
4. Regulatory inspections of local authority children's homes, fostering and adoption will continue separately. Inspection of private fostering arrangements may be carried out at the same time as the inspection of a local authority's safeguarding and looked after children services. Alongside other evidence, such as that arising from serious case reviews, findings from these inspections will help determine the scope and timing of inspections of safeguarding and looked after children inspections.
5. The framework and guidance have been reviewed following the first year of inspections to ensure that they are sharply focused on improving outcomes for children and young people.
6. This framework and guidance remain subject to periodic review.

Frequency of inspection

7. All local authority areas will have at least one inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in the three-year period following 1 April 2009. Timing of inspections will be influenced by evidence from other inspection and regulation, including the annual unannounced inspection of contact, assessment and referral arrangements. Where the inspection judges overall effectiveness of safeguarding or looked after children to be inadequate a further inspection may follow.

Notice given for inspection

8. The maximum notice period for the full inspections of safeguarding and looked after children services is usually 10 working days. In some circumstances, for example where provision has been judged inadequate already or where serious concerns about safeguarding have been raised, a full inspection of safeguarding may be carried out without giving this period of notice.
9. Inspections will not normally be deferred because of staff absence or staff shortages in the local authority.

Inspection teams

10. Suitably experienced inspectors from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission will carry out the inspections of safeguarding and looked after children services.
11. Inspection teams will normally consist of at least three Ofsted inspectors and a Care Quality Commission inspector. Inspectors will usually be on site for up to 10 working days.

User and partner views and surveys

12. In this context, users are the children, young people and their families or carers who are supported by, or who make use of, services.
13. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which service providers have sought and acted on the views of children, young people and carers in reviewing and improving services and outcomes generally. They will also consider the views of those users and partners they speak to during on-site evidence gathering.
14. For each inspection, surveys of children in the authority's care and recent care leavers will be carried out through the office of the Children's Rights Director at Ofsted. These will involve children aged eight years and over and will be web-based, with alternative paper completion as required. Inspectors will also take account of an annual Ofsted survey of the views of social workers and other safeguarding professionals and an annual survey of the third sector. Further details of these surveys will be published separately on Ofsted's website.

Inspecting safeguarding and looked after children together

15. In nearly all instances, the inspections of safeguarding and looked after children outcomes and services will be carried out as a single inspection event. Exceptionally, where provision for either safeguarding and looked after children has been judged inadequate previously or where serious concerns about

safeguarding have been raised, a separate inspection of safeguarding or looked after children may be carried out.

16. The annual unannounced inspections of contact, assessment and referral arrangements for children and young people in need, and children and young people who may be in need of protection, support the programme of inspections of wider safeguarding and looked after children. Any relevant findings or recommendations from one inspection will be followed up in subsequent inspections.

Scope of the inspection

Safeguarding inspection

Definition of safeguarding

17. Ofsted adopts the definition of safeguarding used in the Children Act 2004,¹ and in the government guidance document *Working together to safeguard children*.² This can be summarised as:
 - protecting children and young people from maltreatment
 - preventing impairment of children and young people's health or development
 - ensuring that children and young people are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
 - undertaking that role so as to enable those children and young people to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.
18. Ofsted will review the framework and guidance for these inspections in the light of any recommendations arising from the Munro review and the Government's response.

Working together to safeguard children

19. Inspections of safeguarding will assess the effectiveness with which organisations and individuals work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and the quality of the outcomes they deliver for children and young people. In doing this, inspections will take a broad view of the following.
 - How well agencies and professionals work together to identify, safeguard and promote the welfare of potentially vulnerable groups of children and

¹ *The Children Act 2004*; www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2004/ukpga_20040031_en_1.

² *Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, 2010;
<http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publicatio ns&ProductId=DCSF-00305-2010>.

young people that live in their area. These groups might include children seeking asylum, children in secure settings, disabled children and children treated by health services.

- How well practice is supported and underpinned by effective local policy-making and implementation.

20. Inspectors will evaluate the impact of safeguarding systems and frameworks across local public services on safeguarding and protecting children. This will include:

- safeguarding outcomes for children and young people
- how well safeguarding is prioritised
- whether child welfare concerns are identified and responded to appropriately by the relevant agencies
- the extent to which public agencies discharge their responsibility to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Looked after children inspection

21. As set out in *Care matters*,³ inspection must contribute to improved and sustainable outcomes for looked after children and their families. The looked after children inspection will focus on:

- outcomes achieved
- impact of services
- quality of risk management and decision making in identifying which children need to be taken into care
- quality of care planning, review and support for children in care and care leavers
- placement stability
- safeguarding of looked after children
- access to, and attendance at, suitable schools
- support for families and carers
- the effectiveness of corporate parenting approaches
- preparation for leaving care and adult life and the subsequent support.

Evaluation schedules for inspection

22. The evaluation schedules are set out in a separate document which outlines the main aspects of the services and outcomes against which inspectors will make

³ *Care matters: time to deliver for children in care* (DCSF-00279-2008), HM Government, 2008; www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications.

judgements. The schedules also outline the grade descriptors that inspectors will use in arriving at their judgements. The team of inspectors will gather evidence across the evaluation schedule and all inspectors will contribute to the final judgements made.

Summary evaluation schedule for the safeguarding inspection

23. The summary evaluation schedule for the safeguarding inspection is set out below.

- Overall effectiveness including areas for development
- Capacity to improve
- Ambition and prioritisation
- Leadership and management taking into account:
 - Workforce development
 - User engagement
 - Effective use of resources
- Performance management and quality assurance
- Partnership working
- The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe
- Quality of provision taking into account:
 - service responsiveness
 - quality of assessment and direct work with children and families
 - quality of case planning, reviews and recording
- Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people – children and young people are safe and feel safe

24. Equality and diversity issues will be considered and reported on in all aspects of the evaluation schedule and will contribute to all judgements. A single summary judgement will also be made on the effectiveness with which issues of equality and diversity are addressed and positive outcomes achieved, taking into account all the evidence considered, in the final judgement table.

Summary evaluation schedule for the looked after children inspection

25. The summary evaluation schedule for the looked after children inspection is set out below.

- Overall effectiveness including areas for development
- Capacity to improve
- Ambition and prioritisation
- Leadership and management taking into account:
 - workforce development
 - partnerships
 - effective use of resources
- Performance management and quality assurance
- Quality of provision taking into account:
 - service responsiveness
 - quality of assessment and direct work with children and families
 - quality of case planning, reviews and recording

Outcomes for looked after children and young people

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution including user engagement
- Achieving economic well-being

26. Again, equality and diversity issues will be considered and reported on in all aspects of the evaluation schedule and will contribute to all judgements. A single summary judgement will also be made on the effectiveness with which issues of equality and diversity are addressed and positive outcomes achieved, taking into account all the evidence considered, in the final judgement table.

Grading inspection findings

27. Inspectors will make judgements against the evaluation schedules using a four-point scale.

Outstanding

Good

Adequate

Inadequate

Inspection activity

28. Inspectors will undertake activities that focus on evaluating the outcomes for children and young people and the quality and impact of services in helping to improve outcomes.
29. In preparation for inspection, Ofsted will request a number of documents to help plan the areas for inspection. This list provides primary inspection evidence. It focuses on documents that the local authority will already have in place to support its own functions. It is important that this documentation provides evidence against specific aspects of the evaluation schedule. Where possible, it is helpful to direct inspectors to the particular part of the document that provides the best evidence the authority wishes to be taken into account.
30. Wherever possible the expectation is that local authorities will provide copies of existing documents. This will allow easy access after the letter announcing the inspection is received. Documentation that should be made available is detailed below.

Evidence of effectiveness of safeguarding

- Local Safeguarding Children Board annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding, where available (requirement by April 2011)⁴ or minutes of the last three board meetings, and any multi agency case audits from the last year
- the strategic plan for safeguarding services, for example the Children and Young People's Plan.

Where available:

- any relevant data regarding the number and effectiveness of the Common Assessment Framework.

Evidence of effectiveness of looked after children services

- the strategic plan for the services for looked after children
- any available needs analysis and commissioning plan
- details of placements in local authority, voluntary or private children's homes, fostering or adoption agencies, identifying those that are out of authority, where they are and date of placement.

Where available:

- management report of the independent reviewing officers.

⁴ *Working Together, Chapter 4 (2010);*

<http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publicatio ns&ProductId=DCSF-00305-2010&>

Leadership and management information

- organisation charts for local authority and partner agencies.

Where available:

- the most recent relevant performance management information at team and senior management level and any relevant management reviews conducted in the last year
- summary reports of case file audits in social care over the last year
- workforce strategy and summary of current pressures and priorities.

Access to the views of service users

- details of existing groups of service users and their parents/carers that provide ready made opportunities to meet with children and young people.

Where available:

- summaries of the views of service users and other stakeholders, as collected by the local authority.

31. In addition, inspectors will have access to information that Ofsted already holds such as:

- the Ofsted performance profile
- findings from other relevant Ofsted inspection and regulatory activity, including notifications
- summary of judgements made in serious case review evaluations and action plans following serious case reviews
- Ofsted's fostering and adoption datasets (completed by providers)
- views of service users, social care staff and third sector organisations gathered through questionnaires
- summary of substantiated complaints about the local authority and its partners made to Ofsted that relate to safeguarding and looked after children.

Set-up meeting

32. A meeting will normally be held between the lead inspector, the Care Quality Commission and a representative(s) of the local authority and its partners four days after notification of the inspection. It is for the local authority and its partners to determine who is present at the meeting.

33. The purpose of the meeting is to:

- provide further information about the scope of the inspection

- discuss the indicative timetable. The agenda for enquiry may evolve over the course of the inspection including possible changes to week two programme as a result of the findings in week one
- agree practical arrangements, including survey arrangements, initial interviews and scrutiny of case files with appropriate workers, and provide other clarification as necessary
- provide an opportunity for inspectors to discuss any issues or concerns which have arisen from the pre-inspection reading
- discuss how service users and their families can be directly engaged in the inspection.

Inspection activities

34. Inspection activities will include:

- evaluating the documentation already held by Ofsted
- reviewing the evidence provided by the local authority and its partners in advance of the fieldwork element of the inspection
- reviewing case files
- meetings with users, managers, staff and partners.

Meetings will specifically focus on gathering evidence against the evaluation schedule and may be based on themes or specific areas of work. The interviews and groups may vary depending on the lines of enquiry for each individual inspection.

35. The inspection will specifically evaluate the effectiveness of the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board including the impact the board has on improving outcomes for children and young people.
36. The outcomes of the most recent unannounced annual inspection of contact, assessment and referral will be taken into account by inspectors when evaluating evidence and arriving at judgements and will inform lines of enquiry.
37. Where relevant, inspectors will evaluate the progress made in implementing any recommendations arising from serious case reviews.
38. During the inspection, inspectors will always speak with children and young people and seek views of their parents and carers.

Case file identification, analysis and discussion for safeguarding and looked after children

39. At the set-up meeting the lead inspector will explain how inspectors will identify and analyse case records with, and alongside, key professionals who have oversight of the decision-making process. The main purpose of this activity is to

assess how effectively children in need, including those looked after, are safeguarded and cared for.

40. Case-file scrutiny and discussion will consider:

- the extent to which the welfare concerns of looked after children and other vulnerable groups are identified, assessed and responded to appropriately
- the effectiveness of referral, assessment, planning, intervention and review processes in practice
- the extent to which agencies and professionals work together to safeguard and promote the welfare and development of children and young people
- the effectiveness of practice in relation to children and young people that are in need of protection
- the effectiveness of practice in relation to children and young people entering and leaving care
- the quality of support and care received by looked after children, including placement stability
- the outcomes achieved for looked after children as a result of these services, including health, attendance and progress at school, numbers in full-time education, employment and training and rates of offending
- the provision and monitoring arrangements for looked after children and young people who have been excluded from school.

41. In most instances, case-file analysis will consist of three key elements.

- At least eight cases (four specifically safeguarding and four looked after children) selected by inspectors from the local authority case load before fieldwork begins. The local authority will be expected to carry out an audit of the eight or more selected and share this with inspectors as fieldwork begins (or share the outcomes of recent audits they have undertaken of the eight cases). Inspectors may ask the key worker, manager or a representative to discuss aspects of the case which relate to the lines of enquiry.
- At least a further 12 cases (six specifically safeguarding and six looked after children which includes care leavers) will be selected by inspectors at the start of the fieldwork element of the inspection. Where needed, inspectors will consult with the local authority to ensure that they consider a balance of cases. Where available, managers and key workers will be invited to assist inspectors in their analysis of the selected cases.
- Scrutiny of analysis and evaluation of the case file audit undertaken by the local authority.

42. Following notification of the date of the inspection, the local authority will be required to provide the lead inspector with a list of the following cases:
- all children and young people currently subject to a child in need plan
 - all children and young people currently subject to a child protection plan
 - all looked after children and young people and care leavers, including those in external placements
 - any unallocated cases or cases awaiting transfer to another team.
43. For all children, the local authority will be asked to supply the following information, as recorded on the integrated children's system:
- child's unique identifier
 - date of initial referral
 - date of birth
 - gender
 - ethnicity
 - legal status
 - details of any disability.
44. For the safeguarding case files, the local authority will be asked to detail whether the child is:
- subject to a child protection plan
 - previously subject to a child protection plan
 - subject to a child in need plan.
45. For looked after children, the local authority will be asked to clarify the current placement using the categories:
- placement with parent(s)
 - placement with relatives/friends
 - foster placement with relatives/friends
 - foster placement
 - placement with adopters
 - residential placement (children's home)
 - specialist residential placement (therapeutic)
 - specialist residential placement (residential school)
 - specialist residential placement (health, including child and adolescent mental health services)

- secure accommodation
- supported lodgings
- out-of-authority placements
- other – please specify.

Surveys

46. Following notification of the date of the inspection, the local authority will be required to ensure that invitations and passwords (provided by Ofsted) to complete the following children’s surveys are given to the relevant children, unless they are likely to be unable to understand and complete a survey either on the web or on paper. The local authority should also ensure that children are as far as practicable encouraged and enabled to complete and submit their views through these surveys in confidence:
- all looked after children and young people aged eight and over (Care4Me survey)
 - all children and young people aged eight and over who have left the local authority’s care during the previous 12 months (AfterCare survey).
47. Anonymised findings of children’s surveys will be provided to the local authority. Findings will also be aggregated (without identifying children or the local authority) to form a national database of survey findings, which may be published.

Reporting findings

48. A single report will follow each inspection. It will contain separate sections and grades for safeguarding and looked after children.
49. The report will set out the inspection findings using text and grades, organised under the headings below.

Report contents

About this inspection	Information about the inspection, including evidence base
Service information	Brief contextual information about the services provided in the area
Safeguarding	
Overall effectiveness	Grade
Capacity for improvement	Grade
Areas for improvement	No grade

Ambition and prioritisation	Grade
Leadership and management taking into account:	Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ workforce development ■ user engagement ■ effective use of resources 	
Performance management and quality assurance	Grade
Partnership working	Grade
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	Grade
Quality of provision taking into account:	Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ service responsiveness ■ quality of assessment and direct work with children and families ■ quality of case planning, reviews and recording 	
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people—children and young people are safe and feel safe	Grade
Equality and diversity	Grade
Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Grade
Capacity for improvement	Grade
Areas for improvement	No grade
Ambition and prioritisation	Grade
Leadership and management taking into account:	Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ workforce development ■ partnerships ■ effective use of resources 	
Performance management and quality assurance	Grade
Quality of provision taking into account:	Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ service responsiveness ■ quality of assessment and direct work with children and families ■ quality of case planning, reviews and recording 	

How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?	No grade
Being healthy	Grade
Staying safe	Grade
Enjoying and achieving	Grade
Making a positive contribution including user engagement	Grade
Economic well-being	Grade
Equality and diversity	Grade

50. The draft report will be sent, within 10 working days of the end of the inspection, to the Director of Children’s Services, copied to the chief executives of primary care trusts, for a factual accuracy check.
51. The Director of Children’s Services or representatives must return the draft report with any comments on factual accuracy within five days (15 working days after the end of the inspection).
52. Following this, the final report setting out the inspection findings will be sent to the Director of Children’s Services within 20 working days of the end of the inspection, copied to the Lead Member for Children’s Services, the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Chief Executive of the local authority.
53. The final report will be published on the Ofsted website within 25 days of the end of the inspection (irrespective of appeals or complaints).

Communication and feedback

54. Inspectors will provide regular opportunities for dialogue and feedback during the inspection. Should any unresolved issues of significant risk of harm to a child be identified during the inspection, inspectors will immediately inform the Director of Children’s Services and confirm this in writing at the earliest opportunity. It is expected that any significant risk will be addressed immediately by those responsible.
55. Oral feedback about draft findings, including strengths and weaknesses in practice, will be given to the Director of Children’s Services at the end of the inspection.

Confidentiality

56. Ofsted will take all appropriate steps to ensure that information provided to inspectors remains confidential, as required by statute. However, evidence gathered during inspections may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, although the identity of named individuals will not be

disclosed. Where Ofsted considers that any information provided by children indicates the likelihood of harm, the necessary information will be passed to the local authority's child protection staff for action.

Quality assurance

57. Quality assurance is the action taken to ensure that an inspection is of the quality needed and expected by users, providers and Ofsted itself. As part of this, we will ensure inspectors are suitably experienced in the areas they are inspecting and ensure quality assurance managers are suitably experienced and skilled to undertake this aspect of work.
58. All inspectors are expected to undertake quality assurance of their own and other inspectors' work during inspections. The lead inspector has overall responsibility for ensuring all evidence gathered is robust, reliable and secure. This approach ensures all judgements reached by the inspection team are fully supported by the available evidence.
59. To ensure national consistency, some inspections will be visited by an inspector from Ofsted or the Care Quality Commission to support the quality assurance processes undertaken by the inspection team. During these visits, the visiting inspector will speak to the lead inspector, inspection team members, managers and other staff, and where possible users and other stakeholders. They will also attend any inspection team meetings taking place during their visit. This inspector will always seek views from the local authority and/or partners on the conduct of the inspection and sample the way evidence is being gathered and used.
60. Ofsted will ask the local authority to complete a short evaluation form following each inspection, which will be used to improve the quality of inspections.
61. All inspection reports will be subject to quality assurance procedures.

Conduct during the inspection

62. Inspectors must uphold the highest professional standards in their work, and ensure that everyone they encounter during inspections is treated fairly and with respect. The code of conduct requires inspectors to:
 - evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour
 - evaluate provision in line with frameworks, national standards or requirements
 - base all evaluations on clear and robust evidence
 - have no connection with the provider which could undermine their objectivity
 - report honestly and clearly, ensuring that judgements are fair and reliable

- carry out their work with integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy, respect and sensitivity
- endeavour to minimise the stress on those involved in the inspection
- act in the best interests and well-being of service users
- maintain purposeful and productive dialogue with those being inspected, and communicate judgements clearly and frankly
- respect the confidentiality of information, particularly about individuals and their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests
- take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues.

Expectations of providers

63. In order that inspection and regulation are productive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a professional working environment based on courtesy and professional behaviour. Inspectors are expected to uphold the code of conduct but Ofsted also expects providers to:

- be courteous and professional
- apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with inspectors
- enable inspectors to conduct their visit in an open and honest way
- enable inspectors to evaluate the provision objectively against the standards/framework
- provide evidence that will enable the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision
- work with inspectors to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
- ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on their premises
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the inspector or the inspection team
- draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors promptly and in a suitable manner
- respect that inspectors will need to observe practice and talk to staff and users without the presence of a manager or registered person.

Complaints

64. The great majority of our work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns do arise during an inspection, they should be raised with the lead inspector immediately so that they can be resolved while the inspection is taking place. Any concerns about the factual accuracy of the findings in the

report may be raised with the inspector after the inspection as set out in *Conducting safeguarding and looked after children inspections*.⁵ If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a formal complaint may be lodged. Concerns relating to the health care aspects of the inspection should be referred to the Care Quality Commission through the children's services inspection mailbox, Childrens-Services-Inspection@cqc.org.uk. The Care Quality Commission has published its approach to complaints at: www.cqc.org.uk/contactus/howtoraiseaconcernorcomplaint/howtocomplainaboutcqc.cfm.

65. Normally, a complaint can be made at any stage during an inspection or up to 30 calendar days from the date of publication of any report or letter. Lodging a complaint will not normally delay publication of the report.
66. All complaints will be initially assessed by a designated Ofsted representative and early contact will be made in order to resolve any complaints without delay. Where this is not possible, complaints will be investigated in accordance with Ofsted's published complaints procedure. The complaints procedure, which sets out how providers or users can complain about their inspection and what will happen to their complaint, is available at: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070080.
67. Complaints should be made in writing (including by email to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) to:

Sue Aldridge
Principal Officer, Complaints
Ofsted National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA.

Further information

68. We hope that you find this document useful in helping you prepare for your inspection. If you have any queries about your inspection, please discuss them with your lead inspector when they contact you.
69. If you have any other general queries about the inspections of safeguarding or looked after children, please contact Lisa Pascoe on 0300 123 1231 or lisa.pascoe@ofsted.gov.uk.

⁵ Conducting safeguarding and looked after children inspections (100173), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100173.