

Evaluation report: Ofsted children's services assessment for 2009

Local authority responses to the consultation questionnaires and outcomes from five regional conferences

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 charges Ofsted with providing an annual performance assessment for children's services for each local authority.

In 2009 Ofsted provided this assessment as one element of its contribution to the joint inspectorate Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). In May 2010, as part of the new coalition's programme for government, CAA was abolished. However, Ofsted's statutory duty to provide a children's services assessment remains.

Age group: All

Published: July 2010

Reference no: 100039

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 100039

© Crown copyright 2010



Contents

Executive summary	4
Background	4
Evaluation of the first year of the children's services assessment	4
Key findings	5
Ofsted's response to the issues raised by local authorities	6
The arrangements for the children's services assessment and communication with the local authority	6
The performance profile	7
The tests applied to make the assessment	8
The arrangements for local authority review of the children and young people's plan	9
The impact of the children's services assessment on local services	10
Costs and benefits to the council	11
The links to social care inspection and evaluations of serious case reviews	11
The appeals process	12
Annex 1: evaluation of the arrangements for Ofsted's annual children's services assessment 2009	14
Questionnaire for local authorities	14
Responses to children's services assessment questionnaire (numbers shown as percentages)	24
Annex 2: evaluation of unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements	25
Questionnaire for local authorities	25
Responses to unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements questionnaire	27
Annex 3: Regional conferences held on 29 January 2010, 1, 4, 5, 12 and 15 February 2010	28
Group discussion: questions	28

Executive summary

Background

1. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 charges Ofsted with providing an annual performance assessment for children's services for each local authority.
2. In 2009 Ofsted provided this assessment as one element of its contribution to the joint inspectorate Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). In May 2010, as part of the new coalition's programme for government, CAA was abolished. However, Ofsted's statutory duty to provide a children's services assessment remains.
3. The annual assessment was derived from a performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each of the 152 local authority areas. This performance profile included findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings including the inspections of safeguarding and looked after children, together with data from the relevant Every Child Matters indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS). In order to arrive at the children's services assessment a series of tests were applied to the performance profile; these tests were explained in the guidance document. The first year of the new children's services assessment was a transitional one, prior to the full application of the new assessment process in 2010.
4. The annual children's services assessments for the 152 local authorities in England were published on 9 December 2009. In total 18 local authorities appealed against the assessment they were awarded, of which five were upheld.

Evaluation of the first year of the children's services assessment

5. This evaluation report brings together contributions from a total of 134 local authorities through three sources:
 - a children's services assessment questionnaire (Annex 1), which was distributed to all 152 local authorities in January 2010, of which 59 were returned
 - an evaluation questionnaire (Annex 2), which was distributed to 87 local authorities who had an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements, of which 53 were returned
 - five regional consultation conferences held in January and February 2010, attended by 222 delegates from 121 local authorities.
6. A separate evaluation is currently being undertaken to review the full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services and is therefore not included in this report.

Key findings

- Overall, local authorities recognise the importance of an annual assessment of the performance of children's services, carried out by Ofsted, and welcome the provision of the performance profile which brings together a comprehensive set of performance data in one tool. There is also a recognition that the annual assessment, with its associated inspection activity, and the performance profile contribute to improvement in children's services.
- The very large majority of local authorities reported that the published guidance, which explained the process for awarding the children's services assessment, was clear. A few local authorities felt that in the future more direct contact and dialogue with Ofsted about data, evidence and judgements would be beneficial to the process and its outcomes.
- The publication of a performance profile which summarised the outcomes of inspection findings and performance against national indicators was welcomed. Where concerns were expressed they included comments about the accuracy of some of the data. In addition, some responses highlighted that access to the performance profile, as well as timeliness of the publication of the updates, were areas for improvement.
- Most local authorities responding to the questionnaire were of the view that the application of the assessment tests was clear and fair. Some commented that they did not always understand the weighting given to individual elements of the performance profile when determining the final judgement.
- Local authorities welcomed the principle of self-assessment in providing the local context for the children service's assessment. They also felt that the local authority's annual review of the children and young people's plan should be used more systematically as part of the process and that the arrangements for requesting and using the children and young people's plan review needed to be clearer.
- There was wide consensus that the children service's assessment letter reflected the performance profile accurately. To improve further upon this, local authorities would welcome a more comprehensive letter, reflecting the wide range of children's services and setting out strengths and weaknesses and indications for how they might improve their performance.
- All local authorities that had experienced it were satisfied with the arrangements and quality of the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements. A number of respondents requested greater clarity about the impact of priority actions on limiting the overall grade for children's services.
- Local authorities felt that the appeals process for the children's services assessment was clear and gave them a fair opportunity to present their case.
- Many local authorities felt that the children's services assessment should now take greater account of the new local partnership arrangements in Children's Trusts and make stronger links to the work of other agencies and inspectorates.

Ofsted's response to the issues raised by local authorities

16. Ofsted welcomes the evaluation responses from local authorities and has taken note of the messages. We are committed to building on the acknowledged strengths and improving areas of weakness. In particular, we will act to ensure greater transparency in the assessment process and improved communication and dialogue with the local authority and its partners.
17. We have worked with local authorities to review processes and our guidance to local areas on the arrangements for the 2010 assessment of children's services. In particular we have prioritised:
 - our communication with local authorities to ensure a prompt response to queries and the creation of an opportunity for dialogue about the assessment process and outcomes
 - the presentation, content and functionality of the performance profile
 - transparency in any tests used to make the assessment and the guidance on their application
 - the information that accompanies the children's services assessment
 - the way in which priority actions identified in an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements may be likely to limit the overall assessment of children's services.
18. We are continuing to work with partner inspectorates to:
 - ensure that communication and information sharing between inspectorates and collectively with local authorities and their partners is more transparent, better integrated and avoids duplication.

The arrangements for the children's services assessment and communication with the local authority

19. Almost all of those consulted responded favourably to this aspect of the questionnaire with just over half grading arrangements for the children's services assessment and communication with the local authority as good or better. The additional comments made it clear that respondents were positive about the arrangements for the process and the clarity of the guidance documentation, but would have preferred more communication with Ofsted during the process itself. Conference delegates reported that the process would benefit from greater transparency and more direct contact and dialogue with Ofsted.
20. A few local authorities referred to the challenging nature of a transitional year in moving to a new system. For example, a number had experienced

frustrations stemming from data queries and questions about weightings and the assessment tests. A common concern was that there had been no opportunity for face-to-face meetings with Ofsted inspectors as part of the children's services assessment process.

21. The consultation overall drew attention to the need to improve further joint working between Ofsted, other inspectorates and agencies, particularly the Audit Commission and Government Offices. These comments are noted. However, new arrangements for the children's services assessment in 2010 will be carried out by Ofsted alone.

Suggestions for improvement from local authorities	Action taken/planned
Establish a single point of contact for queries and points of clarification, enabling an improved response.	The guidance clarifies the channels of communication between Ofsted and local authorities.
Establish better contact between the local authority and Ofsted in relation to the children's services assessment.	

The performance profile

22. The conferences and the questionnaire respondents acknowledged the potential usefulness of the performance profile whilst highlighting clear areas for improvement. Over three quarters of respondents judged it to be a good or adequate tool in helping local authorities to analyse and rate their performance.
23. Local authorities regarded the performance profile as a good and helpful development. The 'layer 1' overview and breakdown within Block A were seen as very useful. However, local authorities expressed some concerns which included: gaps in data; data perceived to be 'missing' (such as information on youth services); data not matching that held in other national datasets; the banding/traffic-lighting methodology; the limited access to the performance profile; the performance profile being unwieldy and difficult to use. Specific concerns were expressed about the inclusion of data where the number of providers in a group might be very small, and the particular impact this might have on smaller local authorities.
24. The conferences provided additional feedback and suggestions. The proposed introduction of broader groupings of providers and services within the performance profile was welcomed, alongside the existing facility to 'drill down' to lower layers of information. There were calls for the inclusion of more local data, trends and value-added information and more comparative data. Conference discussions raised questions about the weight that outcomes for 'vulnerable groups' should carry.

Suggestions for improvement from local authorities	Action taken/planned
Widen access to the performance profile for local authority employees.	Each local authority has been offered access to the performance profile for a third nominated person.
Improve the functionality of the performance profile.	The functionality for the August 2010 performance profile has been improved.
Review the currency of the data that populate the performance profile and its usefulness in evaluating performance.	Ofsted has worked with relevant parties to ensure data are as up-to-date as possible. Where possible Ofsted will use the most recent unvalidated data for national tests and examinations. However, there is an inevitable time lag between the publication of data and the publication of the performance profile.
Ensure regular quarterly updates of the performance profile.	Ofsted has reviewed the regularity of updates to ensure they are timely and 'fit' with the various data release dates and assessment activities.
Establish a point of contact for queries about the content of the performance profile and ensure the timely response to such queries.	A dedicated email address is available for data enquires as follows: csdata@ofsted.gov.uk . For all other enquires please telephone Sue Leaver (020 7421 6666) or email csteam@ofsted.gov.uk .

The tests applied to make the assessment

25. Three quarters of local authorities judged this aspect as satisfactory, good or better overall with some reporting that the tests had been helpful in assessing their own performance. The two prompts used in the questionnaire, concerning the quality of the guidance on the tests and their fairness, gave rise to mixed responses. The conferences highlighted the need to improve the transparency surrounding the tests, including greater clarity about banding, weighting and the use of inspector judgement.
26. Some of these concerns related to the types of evidence which were used to make judgements, for example: the use of inspection judgements from non-local authority settings; the use of 'old' joint area review judgements; the focus on outcomes; and judgements made when there were only a very small number of settings.
27. On some key points there was no consensus, either in the questionnaires or at the conferences. Some local authorities welcomed the emphasis on the outcomes of inspections (Block A in the performance profile). Others felt that different types of evidence should also be used and/or given more weight.

Similarly, some acknowledged the primacy attached in the assessment process to the Every Child Matters outcomes 'staying safe' and 'enjoying and achieving'; others felt that too much weight was being given to safeguarding inspection outcomes.

28. Many local authorities felt that the tests based on the performance profile, and the weighting attached to them, should be more transparent.
29. Local authorities recognised that inspector judgement was necessary and appropriate, and that the assessment is not simply a formulaic calculation of data. Whilst wanting transparency, they were well aware of the dangers of a grading system that was inflexible and over-reliant on data. This, in their view, supported their request for informed professional dialogue with Ofsted in relation to the children's services assessment.

Suggestions for improvement from local authorities	Action taken/planned
Broaden the evidence base to take more account of other providers of services for children and young people, including outcomes and recent trends in performance.	The application of the assessment principles for 2010 has been reviewed and published in the revised guidance.
Clarify the guidance on the weighting of individual elements within the performance profile.	Ofsted has revised and published additional guidance to clarify the impact of 'priority actions' in the unannounced visits of contact, referral and assessment arrangements.
Make more explicit within the guidance the criteria and process for making judgements, including those for limiting judgements.	
Consider how trends in performance can be more appropriately taken into account in judging year-on-year performance.	Ofsted will build on previous findings when judging year-on-year performance.
Ensure that local authorities have the opportunity for an informed dialogue about the application of the scoring tests.	Arrangements for better dialogue are outlined in the revised guidance.

The arrangements for local authority review of the children and young people's plan

30. Almost half of the respondents to the questionnaire were very positive about the flexible arrangements for the use of the review of the children and young people's plan in the 2009 process. Conference delegates made the case strongly that local authorities should be able to set the data in the context of their improvement. Some felt that the 2009 arrangements did not make it sufficiently clear if, or how, they should provide a self-assessment or review of their children and young people's plan.

31. Most authorities stressed how highly they valued self-evaluation processes and how strongly they thought that such processes and evidence (as summarised in the review of the children and young people's plan) should be taken into account by Ofsted. However, they were not always sure that Ofsted inspectors took sufficient account of it in the 2009 assessment process. In particular, local authorities wanted to be able to explain the local context of improvement and know that was understood.

Suggestions for improvement from local authorities	Action taken/planned
The review of children and young people's plan should be used by Ofsted inspectors to provide a consistent approach to self-assessment for 2010.	Ofsted has requested copies of the children and young people's plan and review to be used as part of the 2010 assessment.

The impact of the children's services assessment on local services

32. More than 80% of respondents commented that they had found the children's services assessment to be a helpful exercise, largely in providing an external validation of their own views. However, almost half said that the assessment focused on what they already knew. Delegates at the conferences agreed that the reporting process would benefit from recognising more explicitly the strengths and weaknesses in children's services which would also support improvement.
33. Local authorities suggested a number of improvements in the children's services assessment letter, which some felt was too brief, over-simplified and formulaic. Several local authorities commented on the lack of any reference in the children's services assessment letter to the local context. Suggestions centred on the inclusion of strengths and weaknesses, and an acknowledgement of the direction of travel, but local authorities recognised the difficulty of writing in a way that met the needs of different audiences.
34. Many local authorities expressed the view that the approach embodied in the children services assessment letter needed to be strengthened to better reflect the local arrangements for the delivery of children's services such as partnership arrangements between local authorities and a wide range of others.

Suggestions for improvement from local authorities	Action taken/planned
The assessment of performance for a local authority should take local context into account and recognise the partnership nature of service delivery.	Ofsted inspection reports which feed into the children's services assessment already take account of the local context but at an institutional level. Ofsted will take into account the local context more overtly, drawing on the review of the children and

	young people's plan and/or any self-assessment.
The children's services assessment letter should be broader, more explanatory, should highlight strengths and key areas for improvement and reflect the voices of children and young people.	The content of the letter has been revised to better ensure its usefulness to local authorities and their partners.

Costs and benefits to the council

35. From the questionnaire responses, the majority agreed that the children's services assessment process in 2009 had reduced the administrative burden compared with the previous year's annual performance assessment. However, some local authorities felt that there had been no overall reduction in the burden of inspection: the CAA processes, new social care inspection and the continuing need to be accountable to a range of other agencies had, in their view, led to an increased burden.

Suggestions for improvement from local authorities	Action taken/planned
Establish a more joined-up approach across inspectorates and other agencies regarding data and other evidence in order to avoid duplication.	Ofsted has reviewed its use of data and other evidence and provides information in the revised guidance.
Ensure that the process for the children's services assessment is proportionate.	Following the transitional year of the children's services assessment, Ofsted will build on previous work in line with its priority for better inspection that is proportionate to need.

The links to social care inspection and evaluations of serious case reviews

36. Conference delegates who had experience of the new unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements were overwhelmingly positive about them. In particular, the content of the assessment letter following the visit was seen by many as very helpful.
37. Nearly two thirds of respondents to the questionnaire felt that the transparency of the published guidance on social care inspection and evaluation of serious case reviews on the children's services assessment were good. At the conferences, delegates asked Ofsted to be more explicit about the definition and impact of priority actions from an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and about the impact of the evaluation of serious case reviews (Block B of the performance profile) in determining the overall judgement on children's services. Some respondents and delegates

expressed concerns that inspections of safeguarding issues were being given disproportionate weight compared to other outcomes and service provision.

38. Conference delegates welcomed the intention to define more clearly the criteria for determining an 'area for priority action' but there were mixed views on whether these inspections should result in a graded judgement. There was consensus that 'an area for priority action' should refer to failure to follow child protection procedures and/or where a child is discovered to be at immediate risk of significant harm. In these circumstances delegates considered that this would give greater clarity about the likelihood of a limiting judgement on the overall children's services assessment.
39. The very large majority of local authorities who completed an evaluation questionnaire following their unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements were satisfied with the arrangements and the quality of the inspection. Almost all local authorities judged the inspection findings to be fair and accurate with inspectors identifying the right areas for development and priority action. Local authorities felt that the dialogue between staff and inspectors was particularly helpful in identifying ways to improve practice. The demands placed on staff for information and documentation were reasonable and the benefits of the inspection outweighed any negative aspects in the very large majority of cases.

Suggestions for improvement from local authorities	Action taken/planned
Clarify the guidance on the application of limiting judgements.	New guidance on the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements, which includes a revised definition of a priority action, has been published with effect from 1 April 2010. The revised children's services annual assessment guidance for 2010 explains the limiting judgements and provides greater transparency in how they are applied.
Review and make more transparent the weighting of social care inspections and serious case reviews within the children's services assessment process.	

The appeals process

40. The appeals process was commented on as part of the questionnaire only and not discussed at the conferences. Thirty-eight authorities responded to the question, of which 12 had used the appeals process in 2009. Over two thirds of respondents felt that the clarity of the guidance on the appeals process was good or better.
41. Of the relatively small number that added comments based on their experience of the process, the majority were positive, stating that there had been a proper opportunity to make the case for a review and that they had found the response clear and timely. Suggestions for improvement made by individual

authorities included: extension of the timeframe for appeals; incorporation of telephone dialogue; opportunity for a pre-appeal resolution stage; opportunity to present additional evidence; and clarity over the link to the complaints procedure post-appeal.

Suggestions for improvement from local authorities	Action taken/planned – draft
Consider the proposals made for improvement to the appeals process.	The appeals process is set out clearly in the revised guidance document.

Annex 1: evaluation of the arrangements for Ofsted's annual children's services assessment 2009

Questionnaire for local authorities

Ofsted has now conducted the first annual assessment of local authority children's services as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). The assessment contributes to the area assessment and to the organisational assessment of the local authority by providing further evidence for the managing performance element.

We are keen to receive feedback from your experience of the first year and would welcome the collective views of the council. Your feedback will help us to make improvements for 2010. This brief questionnaire invites you to rate key aspects of the process and to comment on:

- the arrangements for the children's services assessment and our communication with you
- the performance profile
- the 'tests' we applied to arrive at the assessment
- the arrangements for self-assessment
- engagement with CAA HMI
- the impact of the children's services assessment on local services
- costs and benefits to the council
- the links with the evaluation of serious case reviews and social care inspection
- the appeals process.

We would particularly welcome comments and views on what worked well, what did not, and why, together with your suggestions for how any problems might be overcome for 2010. If you wish to raise additional points not covered in the questionnaire there is space for you to do so at the end.

We ask you to score our performance on a scale of 1–4 where 1 is poor and 4 is outstanding.

Please return an electronic version of this questionnaire to Sue Leaver (sue.leaver@ofsted.gov.uk) by 25 January 2010.

If you have any questions about this questionnaire or would like to discuss any aspect of the annual assessment for children's services please email: juliet.winstanley@ofsted.gov.uk.

Name of local authority	
Name of person completing the response	
Position	
Contact details	
Contributors to the response	

1. The arrangements for the children's services assessment and our communication with you

	Assessment (1-4)
How effective were the arrangements, guidance and our communication with you?	

<p>Prompts</p> <p>a) Did the information you received in May 2009 explain clearly the new process and what was involved?</p> <p>b) Was the supplementary information, sent with the draft letters in September 2009, helpful?</p> <p>c) Were the links with the joint inspectorate CAA explained clearly? Was it clear how the children's services assessment feeds into the organisational assessment of the council?</p> <p>d) Were you able to get queries answered and clarified promptly?</p> <p>e) Did the process you experienced match your expectations from the guidance you received?</p>
<p>Comments</p>
<p>What improvements could be made to the arrangements, guidance and our communication with you?</p>

2. The performance profile

	Assessment (1-4)
How effective was the performance profile in helping you to analyse and rate your performance?	

Prompts

- a) Section A: the quality of inspected and regulated services and settings
- b) Section B: safeguarding and looked after children inspections and serious case reviews
- c) Section C: the Every Child Matters national indicator set
- d) Did you find the guidance helpful when using the profile for your local authority?
- e) Was it helpful to have the profile updated every quarter?

Comments

What improvements could be made to the content and use of data in the performance profile?

3. The 'tests'

	Assessment (1-4)
Bearing in mind the designation of 2009 as a transitional year how effective were the 'tests' in helping you rate your own performance?	
Prompts a) Was the guidance on the application of the 'tests' clear? b) Were the 'tests' fair in the way they focused on the different elements in the profile?	
Comments	
What improvements could be made to the 'tests', the way the data are assessed and weighted?	

4. The arrangements for local authority self-assessment

	Assessment (1-4)
In 2009, it was optional to provide a self-assessment for children's services, otherwise, where available, inspectors used your review of the children and young people's plan.	

Prompts

- a) Was it helpful to offer this level of flexibility?
- b) Could your review of your children and young people's plan enable you to describe and evaluate your performance for CAA?
- c) Should guidance for local authorities include self-assessment for the annual assessment?
- d) Should we use the review of the children and young people's plan for every local authority as part of the process of deciding the children's services assessment?

Comments

What improvements could be made to the self-assessment process and the part it plays in the annual children's services assessment?

5. The impact of the children's services assessment on local services

	Assessment (1-4)
How effective has the process been in identifying strengths and areas for improvement in the performance of the council's services for children and young people?	

Prompts

- a) Was the children's services assessment helpful to the local authority and its partners in identifying the quality of different aspects of children's services?
- b) Did fewer national indicators result in omissions in important areas? What other available evidence might have helped to fill the gaps?
- c) How useful was the structure and content of the letter in providing a summary of your performance, with key judgements and areas for improvement?
- d) Did the area and organisational assessment include sufficient information on children's services?

Comments

What improvements could be made, for example, to the assessment letter?

6. Costs and benefits to the council

	Assessment (1-4)
How effective do you consider this year's children's services assessment as part of the CAA drive to reduce the burden of inspection overall?	

Prompts

- a) What benefits have you identified from the children's services assessment in improving outcomes for children and young people?
- b) Did the children's services assessment process reduce your administrative burden compared with last year's annual performance assessment?
- c) Was there any part of the process which was most burdensome for your local authority?

Comments

What improvements could be made to the costs and benefits of the CAA process and Ofsted's process for assessment of children's services?

7. The links with children’s social care inspection and serious case reviews

	Assessment (1-4)
How clearly does the guidance set out the impact of outcomes of social care inspection and evaluations of serious case reviews on the children’s services assessment?	

<p>Prompts</p> <p>a) Is it transparent to you how the outcomes of an unannounced inspection, an inspection of safeguarding and looked after children service or the evaluation of serious case reviews inform the annual assessment of children’s services?</p> <p>b) Was it clear to you how, and in what circumstances, a limiting judgement would apply to the children’s services assessment?</p>
<p>Comments</p> <p>What improvements could be made to the guidance, and process, for including the impact of the outcomes of social care inspection and evaluation of serious case reviews in the annual assessment?</p>

8. The appeals process (where appropriate)

	Assessment (1-4)
How well did the guidance for making an appeal against the children's services assessment clarify the process?	

Prompts

- a) Did the appeal arrangements enable you to fully express your concerns and make the case for a review?
- b) Regardless of the outcome, do you feel you had a clear and timely response to your appeal which helped you to understand the reasons for the assessment given?

Comments

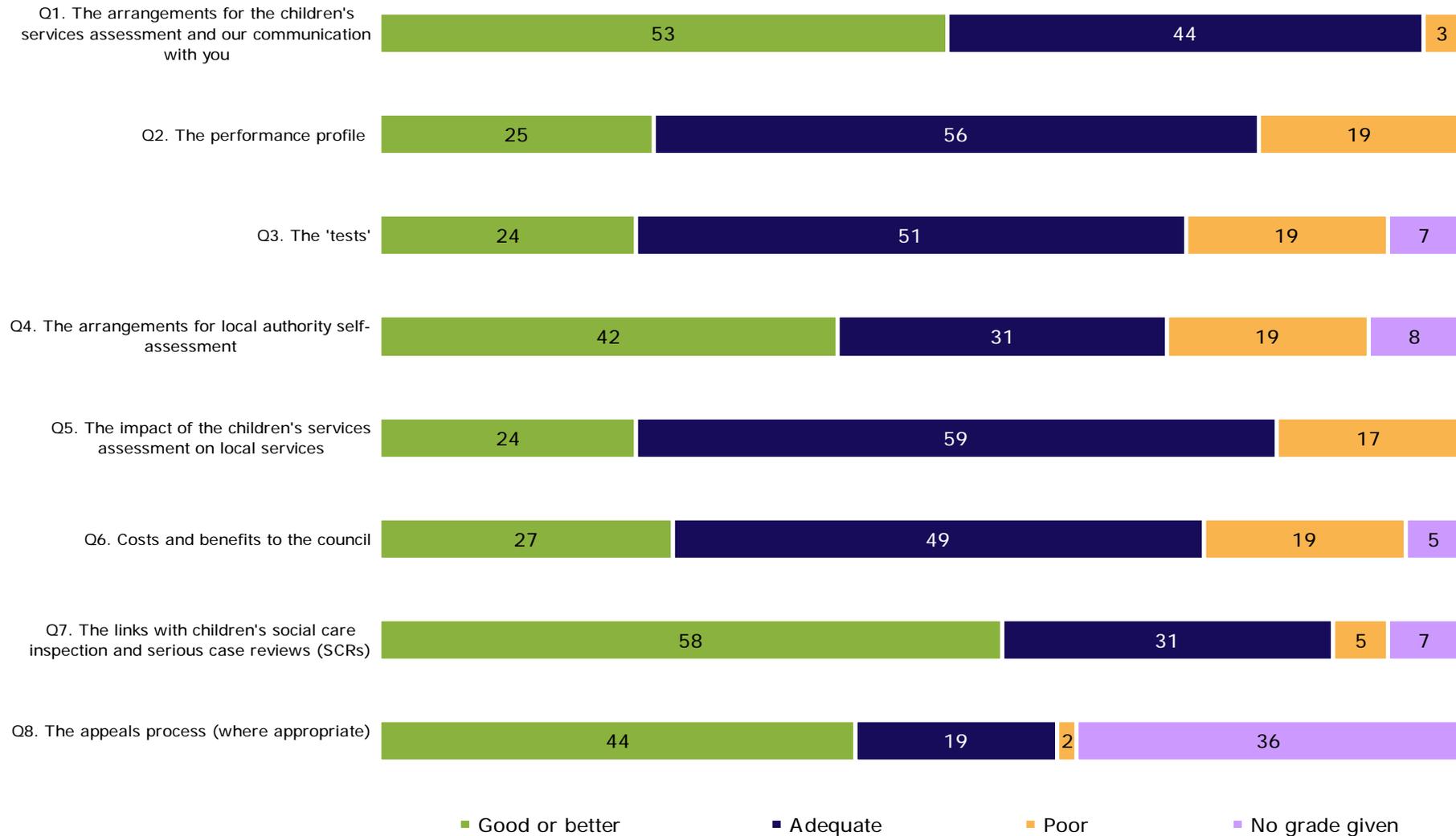
What improvements could be made to the appeals procedures?

9. Additional points

Are there any additional points or comments you wish to make?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please send your response to Sue Leaver (sue.leaver@ofsted.gov.uk) by 25 January 2010.

Responses to children's services assessment questionnaire (numbers shown as percentages)



Annex 2: evaluation of unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements

Questionnaire for local authorities

We are keen to hear about your experience of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and welcome your comments, views and suggestions.

Your responses will be used to help us improve the inspection process. Please complete the following questionnaire so that we can find out what worked well, what did not and why. We would also be grateful for your suggestions as to how any problems might be overcome.

If you would like to raise additional points not covered in the questionnaire there is space for you to include these at the end.

Please return your completed questionnaire to sue.leaver@ofsted.gov.uk.

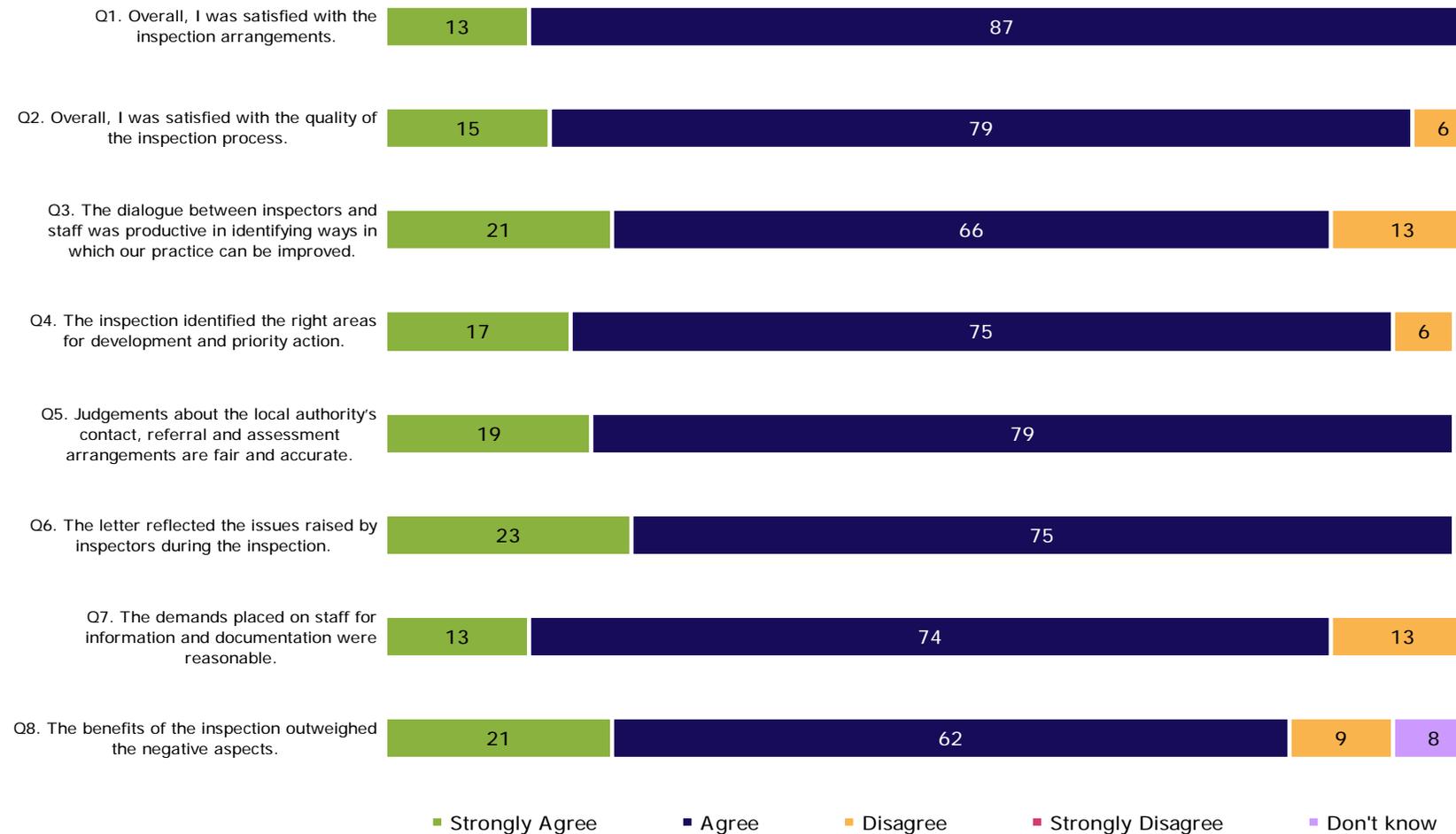
Local authority

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
1.	Overall, I was satisfied with the inspection arrangements.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Comments:					
2.	Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of the inspection process.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Comments:					
3.	The dialogue between inspectors and staff was productive in identifying ways in which our practice can be improved.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Comments:					
4.	The inspection identified the right areas for development and priority action.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Comments:					

5.	Judgements about the local authority's contact, referral and assessment arrangements are fair and accurate.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Comments:					
6.	The letter reflected the issues raised by inspectors during the inspection.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Comments:					
7.	The demands placed on staff for information and documentation were reasonable.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Comments:					
8.	The benefits of the inspection outweighed the negative aspects.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Comments:					
9.	Which aspects of the work of the local authority's contact, assessment and referral arrangements are most likely to be improved as a result of the inspection? Please identify no more than three.					
	1					
	2					
	3					
10.	Any additional comments:					

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Responses to unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements questionnaire



Numbers are shown as percentages.

Annex 3: Regional conferences held on 29 January 2010, 1, 4, 5, 12 and 15 February 2010

Group discussion: questions

An overview of the outcomes of the children's services assessment in 2009

What are the most important areas of the children's services assessment process that require improvement in 2010 and why?

The performance profile and applying the tests

1. Does the performance profile contain the necessary information to ensure the assessments are based on fair and reasonable evidence?
2. Do you agree that inspection outcomes in Block A can be grouped more appropriately?
3. How do we ensure that the assessments have sufficient emphasis on services for the most vulnerable children and young people?
4. Is there anything else that should be included when arriving at the assessment that is not currently included in the evidence base?

Unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment

1. How should we define the difference between an area for development and an area for priority action?
2. To ensure consistency in the link between the inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements outcomes and the children's services assessments, should we reconsider grading the inspections?
3. What should the criteria be for considering a CAA limiting judgement?

Looking forward to 2010

1. How can we ensure that the children's services assessment letter is meaningful and of use to all of its intended audiences?
2. How can the CAA area and organisational text better help in providing a whole picture of children and young people's outcomes in the context of the local area?
3. How can the roles of the link inspector and CAA HMI 'fill the gap' in terms of contact with the council without increasing the burden?