

What children said about how adoption agencies should be inspected in future

An evaluation report on what children and young people told us about our ideas for changing the way we inspect adoption agencies in the future.

You can find out more on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk and the children's rights website www.rights4me.org.

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Who we are

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. We are the people who inspect schools and services that care for children and young people, including all adoption agencies.

We do our inspections to check how good services are for children and young people. When we inspect adoption agencies, our inspectors talk with staff, children and young people. We also talk to adoptive parents to find out whether they think that children being adopted are being found families where they feel safe.

We are separate from the government, but we do tell the government how we think services for children are doing.

What this report is about

We are working on some changes to the way we inspect adoption agencies. We are also thinking about how we decide how well an adoption agency is doing its job. We call the documents that say all this our 'framework' for inspecting adoption agencies.

We asked children and young people to tell us what they thought about our ideas for changing the way we inspect adoption agencies. We did this using an online questionnaire. Some people sent in their answers on paper, and some filled in questionnaires for us using symbols. We have counted their responses along with all those who sent in their answers through the web.

Altogether, 34 children and young people answered our survey, and 13 of these were adopted or waiting to be adopted. This report tells you what they said. Where a number of people said the same sort of thing, we have given quotes of what a child or young person said that sums it up really well.

It also gives a short summary of what adults said about our ideas too.

Then it says what we are going to do next.

What children and young people said about each of the questions we asked them

1. How important is it for inspectors to ask the views of children and young people who are waiting to be adopted?

Twenty-six children and young people told us that it is really important and five told us that it is quite important for inspectors to get the views of children and young people waiting to be adopted.

Here are some of the reasons they gave for saying this is important.

'If they are old enough to speak to the inspectors they have a right to an opinion'.

'Because children are important. The adoption is all about the child'.

'So that children have some say in what happens to them. Instead of it all happening to them'.

'No one else knows what it feels like to be in their situation. They will give you the best insight'.

2. How should inspectors get the views of children and young people waiting to be adopted?

Out of the 30 children and young people who answered this question, 26 told us that talking to children face to face is the best way to get their views. One said we should write to them by post and another thought it was best through an online questionnaire or a special website.

Here are some of the things children and young people said on this question.

'They should talk face to face because sometimes younger children can't get the words out exactly the way they want and so it's easier to help them explain themselves and some kids might get upset, so face to face they can be comforted'.

'It is easier to build trust when you're looking at someone physically'.

'Children need to be seen face-to-face as they need to feel comfortable when being asked quite difficult questions. This can't be done in any other format'.

'face to face creates a relationship which ensures more information and honest responses'.

3. How important is it for inspectors to ask the views of children and young people who have been adopted?

Thirty-two children and young people answered this question. Twenty-four said that it is really important and six said that it is quite important. Two were not sure.

Children and young people said:

'They can tell you how the process was for them – How scary the system is for them'

'They have already gone through the process so have more of an understanding of how they wanted it all to happen and what worked for them and what didn't'

'Because we know what it feels like'

'Gives them a valuable insight into what is wrong with the process so mistakes don't happen twice'.

4. How should inspectors get the views of children and young people who have been adopted?

Out of the 29 children and young people who answered this question, 25 said that talking face to face is the best way to get the views of those who have been adopted. One told us that talking to children and young people over the phone is a good idea.

Children and young people thought this because:

'I think you should talk to the child face to face, because if you don't, it may not be their views you are reading or listening to'

'It is easier to talk freely if seeing from face to face'

'They will get a good idea of how all the adoptions have done and what the problems were when they were first with their mum and dad. It is easy to talk to someone as they ask you a question and you can answer'.

5. How important is it for inspectors to ask the views of the birth parents about the adoption agency?

There were 34 answers to this question. Seventeen children and young people said that it is really important to ask the views of birth parents, with five saying that it is quite important. Seven of those who answered did not think it is important and five were not sure.

Some of the children and young people who said it is really or quite important said:

'Because they can tell you how they was treated'
'All information from all parties is beneficial'
'To ensure a balanced view of the practices of that agency'
'Birth parents have important news to contribute and this may shape their approach and level of co-operation in the future'.

Here is what some of the children and young people who did not think it is important said.

'I don't think its important because most birth parents don't want their kids [taken off] them so wont be very helpful and also if they did have anything [to] say it would probably be negative and not really an honest outlook on things.'
'Because my birth family didn't look after me properly'.
'Most birth parents are not capable of looking after children therefore I cannot see how they would give an accurate and objective view'.

6. We are thinking of telling an adoption agency that we will be inspecting them 10 days before the inspection will happen. Is this the right amount of time?

Out of the 33 children and young people who answered this question, 10 said that this is the right amount of time and nine said the agency should not know at all that they will be inspected. Three told us that they should know more than 10 days before and three also said they should have less than 10 days' notice. Eight of those who answered were not sure.

Comments from those who felt this is the right amount of time are given below.

'If they are working as they should, this should be more than enough notice'.
'...gives them enough time to sort things out and get [organise]'.
'So they can do their paperwork'.

Children and young people who felt they should not know at all said:

'I think this because, it gives the agency enough time to prepare and correct things. I think this is wrong because, the agency should be running properly all the time'

'If they haven't got anything to hide then it wouldn't be a problem'

'Because sometimes when things go wrong they might try and put things right in the records like they did in the phone mail hacking I think that you should be able to go and see what happens at anytime'.

7. Do you agree that adoption agencies which are very good should be inspected less often than the ones that aren't very good?

Seven out of the 30 children and young people who answered this question said yes, that very good adoption agencies should be inspected less often. Seventeen, however, said no and six were not sure.

The children and young people who said yes to this question said:

'It's annoying to be inspected if you know you are doing a good job'

'Concentrate on helping the poor agencies'

'because if [there] good then they don't need to get ready all the time'.

Here are some of the things that children who said no to this question said.

'...as it is not fair if one gets less inspection than another'.

'It's important to inspect regularly as standards can go up and down'.

'Because if they think that they are good all the time they might make mistakes and we are children with a life and if we get placed and [there has] been a problem nobody will know for a lot of time and it might happen again'.

8. What should inspectors judge adoption agencies on?

We asked some questions about what inspectors should think about when they decide how well an adoption agency is doing. Most children and young people agreed with all of the things we said we would make our judgements on. The number of children who agreed with each of these things is below.

What we will base our judgement on	Number of children and young people who agreed
How well children get on	24
How they find and help families	25
How safe children are	32
How well the service is managed	29

We wanted to know if there was anything else that inspectors should judge the adoption agency on. There were 23 responses to this question. Children and young people told us to judge the following things:

‘How long it takes children to find a mummy or daddy’

‘How good they are at getting new families who keep us safe’

‘The quality of staff’

‘How supportive is the agency post-adoption’

‘matching right children to right parents/families’.

Other things children and young people told us

As well as asking our questions, we asked children and young people to tell us anything else they wanted to say about inspecting adoption agencies. Here are the most important messages about what inspectors should look at:

‘[adoption] needs to be faster and not let children be in just a foster carer house for a long time’

‘How good they are at getting new families who keep us safe’

‘support for children after adoption’

‘help siblings of children get adopted’

‘the quality of staff’.

What did adults say to us?

One hundred and fifty-five adults answered a separate questionnaire about our plans for inspecting adoption agencies. Some of the adults were social workers from adoption agencies and local authorities; some were foster carers or adoptive parents, and one was a birth parent.

Adults agreed that getting the views of children and young people adopted or waiting to be adopted is important. They said children and young people had to be old enough to understand and that inspectors should have the right training to do this. They also said that inspectors should talk face to face with children and young people to get their views.

Adults felt that it is right to get views from birth parents as this would help inspectors to see how well the agency is doing. They said that a lot could be learned from their experience and it is right to be fair to them and give them a chance to have a say.

Some adults liked the idea of 10 days' notice to adoption agencies before inspection, but they were not sure how easy it would be to make this work. Staff might be away and adoption agencies might not be able to get the right information ready for inspectors in that time. Other adults did not want adoption agencies to be told before an inspection; they agreed with children and young people that adoption agencies should be ready for inspection at any time.

Adults had mixed views about whether very good adoption agencies should be inspected less often. Some thought that if an agency is very good once, it does not mean it will be very good all the time. Those that thought very good agencies should be inspected less often, thought so because inspectors would be able to spend more time checking on the agencies that are not so good.

Adults were also asked if we should inspect local authority fostering services at the same time as adoption agencies. Some thought this was good as inspectors would be able to get the full picture of what is happening to children. Others felt that this could put pressure on the people who work at the adoption agencies and fostering services.

When asked how we should report on the way equality and diversity is encouraged by adoption agencies, most adults agreed that we should focus on this throughout the inspection report to make sure children and young people are treated fairly.

If you would like to know more about what adults said to us, you can look on our website at a different report called *Responses to Ofsted's consultation on the new inspection framework for adoption agencies*. You can find it at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110145.

What will Ofsted do now?

The most important thing we will do in our inspections is look at the experiences of children and young people who are waiting to be adopted, and children who have been adopted, to see how they get on.

In December 2011, we did some test inspections, to help us find out if the new way of inspecting was right. We tried telling adoption agencies 10 days before the inspection and we also tried out not telling them at all before the inspection started. We wanted to find out which is best. We found that telling adoption agencies 10 days before the inspection is better than not telling them at all. This is because it gives us enough time to make sure that we can arrange to talk to the right people, including making appointments to talk with children and young people.

As well as this, we tried out ways to get the right information before an inspection, using new forms for children, young people, birth parents and adults. These forms can be filled in online and most people said that they liked them.

In February 2012, we published the new inspection framework on our website, and have meetings planned in March to tell adoption agencies all about it. We are also making a short video for children and young people to make sure they know how they can get involved in inspections. We will put it on our website when it's ready.

Thank you!

Thank you to all the children and young people who gave us their views. It has been really helpful to know what you think about our plans. These will help us to do our job properly and to check that adoption agencies help children and young people to find the right families where they feel safe.