

# Conducting inspections of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

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This guidance is to assist Ofsted inspectors when they conduct inspections of the arrangements for the protection of children in local authorities in England.

It should be read alongside the *Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children* and *Inspections of arrangements for the protection of children: evaluation schedule and grade descriptors*.

**Age group:** 0–18

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**Published:** April 2012

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**Reference no:** 120011



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## Introduction

1. This guidance is to assist Ofsted inspectors when they conduct inspections of the arrangements to protect children in local authorities in England. It should be read alongside the *Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children* and *Inspections of arrangements for the protection of children: evaluation schedule and grade descriptors*.
2. Local authorities, other providers and organisations can use this guidance to see how inspections will be conducted and may find it useful when carrying out their self-evaluations. Ofsted publishes all guidance used by inspectors.
3. Inspections are carried out according to the published inspection framework. This guidance document sets out the principles of inspection and the code of conduct, which all inspectors know and apply.
4. With this guidance, we want to balance consistency in inspections with the flexibility to respond to each local authority's individual circumstances. As such, it is not a set of inflexible rules, but guidance on the procedures normally governing inspection.

## Scheduling and team deployment

5. The inspection will be unannounced. When scheduling inspections, we will take account of: previous inspection outcomes; information from other sources such as whistleblowing referrals, complaints and serious case reviews; and any other relevant information.
6. The inspection will take place within a two-week period. Usually, eight days will be spent on site.
7. Normally, five suitably experienced Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) will carry out the inspection. Four will be experienced in social care and its inspection; one will be experienced in the inspection of educational provision. An additional inspector may be added to the team, taking account of previous inspection findings or the size of the local authority being inspected. This decision will be made by the Ofsted Divisional Manager responsible for the inspection programme.
8. The lead inspector will arrive on site on day one. A further two inspectors will join the lead inspector on day two, and two more inspectors will join the team on day three of the inspection.
9. In the inspection, inspectors will undertake either the role of lead inspector or team inspector. The inspection will always be led by a social care HMI. Within each team, the lead inspector will allocate tasks, consulting with the team inspectors where possible. Inspectors must be flexible in the roles and tasks allocated to them during each inspection.

## Deferrals

10. As the inspection is unannounced, inspectors are likely to encounter a variety of complex situations on the day. However, inspections will not normally be deferred.
11. The absence or unavailability of local authority staff, or accommodation issues such as refurbishment, will not constitute reasons for deferral.
12. Illness or non-availability of an inspector must be reported immediately to the managing inspector with lead responsibility. This may result in rescheduling the inspection, unless a replacement inspector is available.
13. In an extreme circumstance, the Delivery Director, Social Care may agree to a deferral. If a deferral is being considered, the quality assurance manager for the inspection should be kept fully informed.
14. Deferrals will only be made where there is a strong case that, if the inspection went ahead, it might place staff at risk, or if inspectors are severely restricted in their ability to gather secure evidence. Such conditions might be:
  - serious weather conditions that make access to sites for inspectors and staff difficult and/or dangerous
  - a power failure meaning that inspectors cannot access electronic records for a prolonged period.

## Timeframe

15. The timeframe for inspection, including preparation, on-site work and the publication of the inspection report is set out below. The inspection team will normally spend eight days on site.

Day	Activity	
0	Preparation (off site)	Lead inspector
1	<p>The local authority will be notified on day one of the inspection (normally a Monday) just prior to arrival on site that the lead inspector will be arriving on site after 12 noon to begin the inspection. The local authority will be asked to prepare the list of information included in Annex A.</p> <p>The phase one team will use the day to prepare for the inspection.</p> <p>The lead inspector and phase one team will have a short briefing at the end of the day (off site) to ensure the team are fully prepared for the on-site inspection activity.</p>	Lead inspector

2	<p>Fieldwork on site</p> <p>The lead inspector plans the remainder of the on-site inspection, working closely with the Director of Children's Services (DCS) or a representative.</p> <p>The phase one team are inspecting on site. The remainder of the inspection team will prepare off site.</p> <p>The lead inspector and full inspection team will have a short briefing at the end of the day (off site) to ensure the team are fully prepared for the remainder of the on-site inspection.</p>	Lead inspector and phase one team
3-7	<p>Fieldwork continues</p> <p>All inspectors are on site.</p>	Lead inspector and full inspection team
8	<p>The lead inspector, inspection team, quality assurance (QA) manager (where on site) and DCS (or their representative) take part in the judgement meeting.</p> <p>Feedback to the DCS and partners</p>	Full inspection team
9-10	<p>Report drafting, including a children's version of the report</p>	All inspectors coordinated by the lead inspector
11-18	<p>QA procedures</p> <p>A draft report is sent to the DCS, copied to the Local Safeguarding Children Board for a factual accuracy check (within 10 days of the end of fieldwork.).</p>	Lead inspector and QA manager
23	<p>DCS responds to draft report</p>	
24-28	<p>Receipt of comments from DCS, amendments and final stages of QA</p> <p>Pre-publication report sent to DCS, Chair of Local Safeguarding Children Board, local authority Chief Executive Officer and lead member (within 20 working days of the end of fieldwork).</p>	Lead inspector and QA manager
30	<p>The inspection report is published on Ofsted's website (within 22 working days of the end of fieldwork).</p>	

## Pre-inspection activity

- Pre-inspection analysis and planning are an important part of all inspections. Lead inspectors will have a day allocated, before fieldwork begins, to review documents and to ensure that the follow-up fieldwork is properly focused and used to best effect in collecting first-hand evidence.

17. The lead inspector will be provided with a pre-inspection briefing from the senior data analyst. This will summarise:
  - findings from relevant Ofsted inspections and regulatory activity
  - relevant information from any meetings between the local authority and the link HMI
  - relevant nationally collected data
  - the learning from any serious case reviews undertaken, and the outcome of Ofsted's evaluation of any such reviews
  - evidence from the Ofsted whistleblowing hotline
  - other related published documentation, such as the Local Safeguarding Children Board annual report.
18. The senior data analyst will ensure that the briefing contains all the information the lead inspector will need, including details about each contact, referral and assessment site. Ofsted's inspection support team maintains an updated list of all contact, referral and assessment sites and the arrangements for out-of-hours services through regular contact with the local authority.
19. Lead inspectors will use this information and the relevant evidence to decide which site(s) to visit at the beginning of the inspection.
20. The lead inspector has a day to assimilate the briefing, identify key lines of enquiry and further develop the briefing. The briefing should be a sharp and concise document indicating the main issues for the inspection and must be completed against the main headings of the evaluation schedule. The final document should be emailed to the inspection team and must be a critical part of their preparation before any on-site inspection activity.
21. All team inspectors must have read the briefing and familiarised themselves with the relevant material and profile of the local authority before arriving on site.

## **On-site inspection – day one**

22. The lead inspector will notify the local authority of the inspection on the day that the fieldwork is scheduled to begin, and before visiting any of the sites.
23. The lead inspector will telephone the office of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) just before arrival at the inspection site. If the DCS is not available, the lead inspector will speak with the most senior manager available and ask them to notify the DCS or, if the DCS is not available, the Chief Executive. If the DCS is not contactable prior to the visit, the lead inspector will email the DCS to notify them of the inspection (see Annex B).

24. The non-availability of the DCS or a senior manager will not delay the start of the inspection. The lead inspector will not arrive on site before 12 noon.
25. Upon arrival, all inspectors will confirm their identities by producing their Ofsted identity badges. It is not necessary to carry paper copies of Criminal Records Bureau checks.
26. The lead inspector will ask to meet with the most senior manager available in the contact, referral and assessment service for an initial meeting.
27. The lead inspector will aim to:
  - outline the format of the inspection with the first phase focusing on the contact, referral and assessment arrangements
  - provide information for affected staff such as copies of the summary of the framework explaining the purpose of the inspection (see Annex C)
  - arrange a working space including, where possible, a room for confidential discussions between inspectors and staff members for this first phase (The lead inspector will also make clear the arrangements for work space that are needed for the whole inspection, which may need to change over the course of the inspection.)
  - advise the local authority of the contact details of the allocated HMI responsible for quality assurance
  - confirm arrangements for interviewing staff
  - gain an understanding of how the overall contact, referral and assessment and out-of-hours arrangements are structured, as well as any issues specific to the site being inspected
  - agree arrangements for access to files and information technology systems, including staff support to access the systems
  - clarify whether there are any outstanding serious incidents that are awaiting notification or have been notified to Ofsted already
  - make arrangements to meet with the DCS or their representative to plan the remainder of the inspection.

## Information requested

28. For day two of the inspection, the lead inspector will ask the local authority to provide, from their internal electronic records, the information required to identify the children and young people that will be tracked and sampled during the inspection. Ideally this will be on an Excel spreadsheet – there is a template on the Ofsted website at: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20120004](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20120004).
29. The lead inspector will need a list of multi-agency meetings during the fieldwork period, such as: initial and review child protection conferences; core groups; and any planned strategy meetings. The lead inspector will indicate the

geographical areas to be covered, which will be reviewed on a regular basis between the lead inspector and the local authority.

30. As soon as the case information is available, the lead inspector will begin to identify the children and young people whose experiences will form the focus of the inspection. This will be based on the case list provided by the local authority, and through scrutiny of the scheduled multi-agency meetings during the course of the inspection.
31. For some cases selected, inspectors will ask for a sample of supervision files. These are likely to link to the children's cases identified in the sample by the lead inspector. The timing of the availability will be agreed with the inspector once the sample has been identified.
32. Annex A lists other information that we request to inform the inspection.
33. It is expected that the local authority will maintain this information to inform their oversight and management of the service. It is not expected that the local authority will need to prepare any new information for the purpose of the inspection. Information should be made available to inspectors at a suitable and agreed time during the inspection.
34. The lead inspector may email documents to team members for scrutiny as part of their off-site preparation.

## **Team briefings**

35. The lead inspector will ensure all inspectors are aware of the arrangements for the relevant briefings at the end of day one and the end of day two. The purpose of these briefings is to:
  - provide information about the key issues arising from the preparatory work
  - allocate tasks and responsibilities ensuring that team members are supported and able to provide challenge to each other
  - outline the evidence gathered to date and the initial findings
  - discuss any lines of enquiry generated by earlier inspection activity
  - share the provisional inspection plan for the remainder of the inspection
  - consider any health and safety risks for individual inspectors (inspectors should use the Ofsted generic hazard assessment form)
  - arrange details and location(s) of the site(s) to be inspected, for example, if contact, referral and assessment services are provided on more than one site, the lead inspector will decide if more than one site is to be visited and how best to devolve tasks
  - identify which inspector will observe any scheduled meetings or visits.

36. The lead inspector will allocate a clear role to each inspector in the inspection team, directly related to the evaluation schedule. Inspectors will not work in isolation. Where possible, inspectors will work in pairs across the judgement areas to provide challenge and scrutiny to each other's work, as well as considering the issues more broadly.
37. Inspectors will then: contribute the relevant sections of the evidence; lead the discussion at the judgement meeting; prepare feedback; and draft that section of the inspection report. The lead inspector will also identify who will write the children and young people's version of the report.

## **Meeting with the Director of Children's Services and planning the inspection – day two**

38. The lead inspector will make arrangements to meet with the Director of Children's Services (DCS) or their representative on day two to plan the remainder of the inspection (or earlier if the DCS requests). The local authority may decide who should be present at that meeting.
39. The purpose of the meeting is to:
  - provide further information about the scope of the inspection
  - discuss the plan for the remainder of the inspection
  - agree practical arrangements as needed, such as work space, practice observations and shadowing meetings and visits, and scrutiny of case files with appropriate workers
  - confirm arrangements for interviewing staff
  - clarify whether there are any outstanding serious incidents that are awaiting notification or have been notified to Ofsted already
  - advise the local authority of the contact details of the allocated quality assurance HMI
  - discuss how the experiences of children, young people and their families can be directly part of the inspection (The local authority will be asked to make contact with a small number of children, parents and carers from the sample to speak to inspectors over the course of the inspection.)
  - understand the arrangements to protect children in the local authority, including the early help offer and any relevant contextual issues
  - understand the structure, roles and responsibilities of all relevant managers in the local authority.

40. The majority of inspection evidence will be gathered by looking at individual children's experiences. When planning the inspection, inspectors and the local authority should ensure that:
- practice observations allow enough time before/after to speak to social workers and/or children, young people and their families
  - where possible, the planning allows 30 minutes between any practice observations/meetings/interviews
  - the planning factors in travel time if a site visit is some way away from the base
  - names and job roles of those attending the multi-agency meetings/interviews are specified
  - staff are given the opportunity to provide their evidence separately to those that manage them
  - if the need for any meeting arises, the lead inspector asks for these as soon as they become apparent
  - where sufficient information has been gathered to make judgements against the evaluation schedule and lines of enquiry may be closed, lead inspectors will advise the local authorities where scheduled meetings are no longer required
  - the inspection plan is reviewed with the local authority at appropriate intervals, for example at the end of week one.

## **Inspection activity**

41. Inspections will focus on direct practice by:
- scrutinising and discussing a sample of children's cases that reflect all the stages of a child's journey alongside social work staff and, where appropriate, other professionals working with the child or young person
  - meeting, as appropriate, with children, young people, parents and carers who are the subject of a sub-set of the cases sampled
  - shadowing staff in their day to day work, for example observing: work in the duty team; the work of social workers with children and families; and the work of independent reviewing officers
  - observing practice in multi-agency meetings such as strategy meetings, child protection conferences, or resource panels that coordinate multi-agency support.

## Tracking individual children's experiences

42. Inspectors will track the individual experiences of at least 20 children. The sample will include:
- those children and young people identified by universal services such as schools, police, health services and children's centres as at risk of harm, but who have not yet reached the threshold of 'suffering or likely to suffer significant harm' (the 'significant harm threshold') and for whom a preventative service would reduce the likelihood of that risk or harm escalating
  - those children and young people referred to the local authority, including those where urgent action has to be taken to protect them, those subject to further assessment and those subject to child protection enquiries<sup>1</sup>
  - those who become the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan that sets out the help that will be provided to them and their families to keep them safe and to promote their welfare
  - those children and young people who are receiving social work services from the local authority where there are significant levels of concern about their safety and welfare but these have not reached the significant harm threshold
  - those children and young people who are assessed to no longer need a child protection plan, but who may have continuing needs for help and support.
43. The lead inspector will randomly choose the sample of children from the case data requested on day one. This will include children currently subject to an open case and also those cases that have been closed over the previous three months. Case files are only one aspect of tracking the child's journey. Inspectors will enhance their understanding of the child's experience through evidence from other sources, such as the child, the family, the social worker or other professionals. Some practice will be observed in as many cases as possible.
44. The sample will be decided by the lead inspector who will identify cases randomly. Some of the sample will be based on available opportunities to observe practice during the inspection. The sample will be adjusted to ensure a balance of:
- age, gender, disability and ethnicity
  - children living with domestic abuse, adult mental health issues and substance misuse
  - practitioner and team.

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<sup>1</sup> Under section 47 of the Children Act 1989; [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

45. The sample will also include cases that link to the lines of enquiry identified by the lead inspector before arrival on site, or particular children that are identified through the sample information, such as children that appear to have experienced significant delay. In exceptional cases, the lead inspector may request a small number of additional cases to test the quality of service for specific groups of children and young people needing help or protection with a high prevalence in the local authority being inspected.
46. As well as this sample, the local authority will be asked to identify three cases that demonstrate good practice.
47. In most cases, case files (either electronic or paper-based) will be examined in the presence of a relevant staff member, using their knowledge of the case, file structure and recording systems. In the absence of the allocated worker, a suitable colleague may be asked to assist. Most case file reading will track some aspects of the child's journey and some will lead to practice observation and/or meeting with children, young people and their families.
48. Where the child's journey is looked at retrospectively, judgements will be based on contemporary practice. Judgements will generally be based on practice from the last six months, although inspectors may read some historical information to understand the child's journey.
49. Where case files are wholly or partly electronic, the local authority should arrange for each inspector to have individual access to their electronic system. During the course of case file reading, inspectors must return any paper case files the service needs access to.
50. Inspectors will examine, discuss and evaluate cases in line with the criteria set out in the evaluation schedule. Annex D can be used as a recording pro forma for individual cases.
51. The main purpose of looking at individual cases is to assess how effectively children are helped and protected and their needs met. Therefore, inspectors will not only use the content of case files as evidence of social care practice and the quality of management oversight and decision-making, but also as a basis for direct discussion and interviews with managers and front-line workers, including workers in adult social care services.
52. Inspectors will review a sample of supervision records related to the sample of children.

## **Case sampling**

53. In addition to detailed tracking of individual children's experiences, inspectors will evaluate specific points in the child's journey, such as the effectiveness of the contact, referral and assessment arrangements and the effectiveness of

decision-making, through more targeted sampling of case files. Inspectors will look at the experiences of at least 30 children and young people in this way.

54. Case sampling will also be used to triangulate issues of both weak and good practice raised through tracking individual children's cases, for example to establish whether weaknesses in practice reflect systemic issues. Inspectors will record whether a case has been sampled or tracked.
55. In both case tracking and case sampling, the numbers may be adjusted to take account of the size of the authority.

## Observations of practice

56. Observations of practice is a key evidence-gathering activity. Annex E can be used as a recording pro forma.
57. During any observations of practice, inspectors will be sensitive to the potential pressures on, and the apprehension of, staff and children, young people and families. Inspectors will negotiate with the local authority the appropriateness of each observation and whether they should observe whole or part of the activity. Any observation of planned meetings will be with the consent of the children, young people and families. Local authorities will be asked to gain this consent and inspectors will confirm it with the children, young people and families. Inspectors will explain that the purpose of the inspection is to assess the effectiveness of help and protection for children, young people, their families and carers; it is not to make judgements about individuals.
58. In looking at individual cases, inspectors will take opportunities to observe staff engaged in multi-agency help and protection of children and young people.
59. Inspectors will target their inspection activity where they are most likely to gather robust evidence within the time available. This may involve observing meetings such as:
  - child protection conferences, initial and review
  - core groups
  - strategy discussions/meetings
  - multi-agency panels
  - planned child protection monitoring visits
  - practitioner meetings in adult social care or mental health/drug treatment services where there is an interface with a child protection case.
  - and also preventative work such as multi-agency 'team around the child'.
60. Inspectors will ask managers to observe practice alongside them in some instances.

61. After any observation of practice, the inspector is likely to have a brief discussion with the child, young person and family about their experience.
62. After any observation of practice, the inspector will have a brief discussion with the practitioner (and manager if present) about what they have just observed, and provide an opportunity for any clarification needed. They will not make a four-point scale judgement about the practice, but will evaluate what they have seen and discuss their overall impression.
63. Observations of practice in multi-agency meetings will evaluate the contribution that all agencies make to the help and protection of children and young people. It will not be possible to feed back to all the agencies involved in multi-agency meetings, but inspectors will always aim to have a brief discussion with the lead practitioner (and manager if present) as described in paragraph 62.
64. Inspectors will risk assess any observations of practice and let colleagues know where they are.

## **Hearing the views of children and young people and their families**

65. There are various ways to understand and hear the views of children, young people and their families. These include:
  - direct testimony
  - views directly recorded in case files and meeting minutes
  - views expressed by practitioners
  - views expressed by others advocating for children, young people and their families
  - analysis of the views received by the local authority as feedback from children, young people and their families.
66. The lead inspector will ask the authority to approach a small sample of children and families that have been identified as part of the case tracking to meet with inspectors as part of the inspection. Inspectors will provide the authority with guidance to help prepare children, young people and families to be involved in the inspection (see Annexes F and G). Local authorities should gain the consent of the children, young people and families before involving them in the inspection.
67. The purpose of the meeting with children, young people and their families is to gather evidence of the impact and effectiveness of the help they have received or are receiving.

68. The lead inspector will also want to see and hear the impact of local consultation with children and families to demonstrate how their feedback has been asked for both individually and collectively, taken into account and, where appropriate, impacts on practice, strategy, service development and design.
69. Inspectors will work with local authorities to ensure that any child or young person with communication difficulties has access to the necessary support to facilitate her/his full involvement in the inspection.

## **Interviews and meetings with groups of practitioners and/or managers**

70. Some areas of the evaluation schedule enable inspectors to gather and triangulate evidence by meeting with groups of practitioners and/or managers. However these will be limited in number. The inspector leading the group will usually identify the key practitioners and agencies to be represented; the meetings will usually be scheduled for the latter part of the inspection. Inspectors may gather evidence through telephone interviews.
71. Inspectors will meet with a group or groups of practitioners specifically as part of their consideration of the early help offer. These groups might include those working in children's centres or schools, health professionals and the voluntary sector.
72. Inspectors will create opportunities to engage with middle managers. This is likely to be through individual discussions relating to practice issues and how policy translates into practice.
73. Inspectors will meet with: the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) or their representative; the lead member for children's services; and the DCS. Given the unannounced nature of these inspections, where these individuals are not available, inspectors will meet with those who are deputising for them in their absence. The lead inspector will determine which other managers or practitioners they need to make contact with, such as members of the LSCB or representatives from mental health services or other adult services.
74. Inspectors will gather evidence about the effectiveness of the LSCB through their engagement with partner agencies. This could be as a group discussion or may be conducted through individual telephone interviews.
75. In exceptional circumstances, the lead inspector may decide to meet with other groups of staff if there are issues arising from the tracking of individual children's cases or observations of practice that need further exploration to triangulate evidence.
76. Where, as part of the assessment of the quality and effectiveness of local authority leadership and management, inspectors identify an issue arising from the local authority's arrangements for discharging the DCS and lead member for

children's services functions, they may decide to look at the quality and effectiveness of the authority's assurance process.

## Documentation

77. The inspection team will review the documentation requested in Annex A. In exceptional circumstances, the lead inspector may request additional evidence. Where documentation is presented but has not been requested by an inspector, it will only be evaluated where it directly relates to the evaluation schedule for the inspection. The local authority will be expected to be explicit about what it believes to be the relevance of other material provided.

## Issues of concern

78. Where serious issues of concern arise, for example in relation to the failure to follow child protection procedures and/or where a child is discovered to be at immediate risk of significant harm, the senior manager nominated by the local authority will be notified as soon as possible.
79. Inspectors should be aware of the *Ofsted safeguarding policy and procedures*<sup>2</sup> and contact the Compliance, Investigation and Enforcement team via the National Business Unit helpline: 0300 123 1231 if they need advice. The quality assurance HMI will also be informed. Where the matter relates to the immediate safety of children, the local authority will be asked to provide a response and explanation. The concern and request for a response will be confirmed in writing to the DCS at the earliest opportunity.

## Inspection team meetings

80. The team should meet briefly at different points during the course of the inspection to share initial findings and evidence and keep the lead inspector fully aware of any developments. The lead inspector will determine all team meetings.
81. The team should meet for a more extended period at the end of day seven to discuss emerging findings, and at the beginning of day eight to finalise judgements and identify areas for improvement.
82. If, at any point, the local authority is giving cause for significant concern, the lead inspector should let the DCS know that it is possible that overall effectiveness may be judged inadequate. They must emphasise that provisional judgements are not made until the final team meeting towards the end of the inspection.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ofsted safeguarding policy and procedures* (100183), Ofsted, 2010;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ofsted-safeguarding-policy-and-procedures](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ofsted-safeguarding-policy-and-procedures).

83. The outcomes of team meetings contribute to the evidence record.

## **Engaging the Director of Children's Services and senior staff during the inspection**

84. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) or another member of the senior staff is normally invited to attend some meetings with inspectors to be kept informed of emerging findings. Contact with the DCS is likely to be on a daily basis.
85. Although the lead inspector should offer the DCS opportunities for engagement, this is not mandatory. The DCS may choose whether or not to accept; they may not be available to meet with the lead inspector due to other commitments. The extent to which the DCS engages with the inspection team must not influence inspection judgements.
86. The lead inspector should check that the DCS is clear about the relationship between the evidence and the emerging and/or substantiated judgements.

## **Involvement of the Director of Children's Services at the judgement meeting**

87. At the end of the inspection, all inspectors need to have reviewed their evidence and triangulated this with colleagues. Inspectors will have begun to develop an emerging judgement in each area.
88. To finalise these judgements, inspectors must meet to weigh the evidence against the grade descriptors outlined in the evaluation schedule. The lead inspector will invite the DCS (or their representative) and other relevant senior colleagues to this final judgement meeting. The lead inspector will negotiate with the DCS so that the numbers attending are manageable in the lead inspector's view.
89. The lead inspector should make clear that the judgements made at the judgement meeting are made by the inspection team. Judgements cannot be negotiated with the DCS.
90. The DCS is invited to attend the judgement meetings in order to:
- act as an observer to better understand the detail of the evidence that the team uses to reach judgements
  - take the opportunity to clarify any outstanding issues
  - comment, where relevant, on the findings of the team

- provide greater transparency about the inspection
  - reduce the need for extended feedback.
91. If a quality assurance manager is on site, s/he will meet with the DCS and attend the judgement meeting. Following discussion with the lead inspector, the quality assurance manager may chair this meeting. The judgement grades should be recorded and key points for feedback should be identified as the meeting progresses.
92. The lead inspector will agree with the DCS the format for the meeting and how they will have opportunity to contribute.
93. So that judgements are clear and to inform feedback, inspectors should produce bullet-pointed summary evidence that highlights strengths and areas for improvement on:
- the overall effectiveness
  - the effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers
  - the quality of practice
  - leadership and governance.
94. The lead inspector should ensure that the DCS understands the inspection team's recommendations for improvement. If appropriate, areas for improvement may also focus on helping local authorities to maintain and further develop areas of good and outstanding performance.
95. In circumstances where aspects of leadership and governance are an emerging area of concern, particularly the leadership of the DCS, the lead inspector may discuss with the DCS whether or not s/he wishes to be present at the judgement meeting. Ultimately, attendance is at the lead inspector's discretion and they may, in exceptional circumstances and following discussion with the DCS, decide it is not appropriate.

## After the inspection

### Formal headline feedback at the end of the inspection

96. Before leaving the local authority, the lead inspector must make clear:
- the provisional grades for each judgement as set out in the evaluation schedule
  - that the grades may be subject to change because of quality assurance checks and should, therefore, be treated as confidential until the local authority receives a copy of the final inspection report

- that the main points provided orally in the feedback will be referred to in the text of the report
  - the areas for improvement
  - the procedures leading to the publication of the report
  - the complaints procedure.
97. As there will be regular dialogue or close engagement with the DCS and senior staff during the inspection, there should be no need for a lengthy or formal final feedback session. Where the DCS and senior staff have been involved in discussion with inspectors and the judgement meeting, they should already have a clear and detailed understanding of the inspection outcomes before the feedback. This will usually be a short meeting focusing on the key headline findings.
  98. Attendees may also include other senior staff that were not present at the judgement meeting. If it is appropriate, representatives from the LSCB, partner agencies and/or the lead member may also be invited by the DCS.
  99. The lead inspector should explain the purpose of the feedback session to those present. Where there has been close engagement with the DCS and/or senior staff, they are likely to be able to answer questions from the stakeholders present. Attendees may ask for clarification about the judgements, but discussion should not be lengthy.
  100. In the event that the DCS has declined the opportunities to engage with the inspection team or has been unavailable for other reasons, the lead inspector should prepare a more extended formal feedback meeting. In such circumstances, the lead inspector should inform the DCS of the main findings in advance of the extended formal feedback meeting.
  101. All inspectors may have a role in feedback, affording the opportunity for dialogue and clarification where appropriate. Roles will be determined by the lead inspector.
  102. A team inspector will compile a contemporaneous note of the attendees and the content of the feedback, which will be passed to the lead inspector for retention.
  103. The lead inspector will confirm that the draft inspection report will be sent to the DCS and LSCB for their comments on factual accuracy.

## Recording evidence

104. Throughout the inspection process, inspectors will maintain contemporaneous records, in accordance with Ofsted guidance, of the evidence obtained from all aspects of the inspection process, including the inspection feedback meeting. Evidence may be scrutinised for quality assurance monitoring and will be considered in the event of any complaint.
105. Inspectors should maintain a summary of evidence and analysis and a record of all the case files they have seen. Inspectors should take account of the following.
- Evidence should be clear, and the date and time of the meeting/recording of the evidence should be noted.
  - As far as possible, evidence should not include anything that could identify individual staff, individual children, young people or family members. Only job titles of staff and only case reference numbers and/or initials of cases should be recorded.
106. All inspections records will be retained by Ofsted in accordance with its published retention policy.<sup>3</sup>

## Writing the report

107. After the inspection, the lead inspector will allocate sections of the report to the team to write. It is the lead inspector's responsibility to collate all the information into a final report following the fieldwork. The text, balance and tone of the report must reflect the judgements made about the quality of children's experiences. Reports should be concise, argued well, and based on robust evidence. Reports are likely to be no more than 15 pages in length. They should be written in plain English and free of jargon.

## Overall effectiveness

108. This section should be a brief summary of the outcome of the inspection, explaining the main reasons for the overall effectiveness judgement. It should highlight any outstanding practice and state the local authority's strengths clearly. It must include reference to any areas for improvement.
109. The report should not include a description of the inspection process, as this is detailed in the relevant frameworks.

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<sup>3</sup> *Handling and retention of inspection evidence* (100122), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100122](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100122).

## **Areas for improvement**

110. Areas for improvement should be precise, specific and detailed. They must include reference to the areas of performance that are hindering improvement. If appropriate, areas for improvement may also focus on helping local authorities to maintain and further develop areas of good and outstanding performance. The lead inspector will indicate the timescales, which are likely to be immediately, within three months and within six months.

## **All other sections of the report**

111. Inspectors should inspect against the full evaluation schedule, identifying the key aspects of practice that support the judgements, including strengths and weaknesses.
112. While all areas of the evaluation schedule must be inspected, the report should focus on the key strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors do not need to write a section of the report about each of the evaluation schedule's criteria, but they must include enough detail in the report to support their judgement.

## **The children and young people's summary**

113. After each inspection, a short summary of the key inspection findings will be produced. The main purpose of this is to provide feedback to children and young people in the local authority about the quality of the arrangements to help and protect them. This short summary report will usually be less than two pages and provide a concise overview of what the local authority is doing well and where it needs to improve. This report will be sent to the local authority at the same time as the draft report for any comments about accuracy.
114. The final version will be published on the Ofsted website and a copy will be sent to the local authority to share with children and young people and their families.

## **Quality assurance**

115. Quality assurance is the action taken to ensure that an inspection is of the quality needed and expected by users, providers and Ofsted. As part of this, inspectors will be suitably experienced in the areas they are inspecting and quality assurance managers will be suitably experienced and skilled to undertake this work.
116. 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 that all the evidence gathered is robust, reliable and secure. Therefore, all judgements reached by the inspection team will be fully supported by the available evidence.

117. Some inspections will be visited by an inspector from Ofsted 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 that evidence is being gathered and used.
118. 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.
119. All inspection reports will be subject to quality assurance procedures, which include a central consistency check and moderation of the draft and final reports against the evidence and evaluation schedule, and clearance of the report and judgements by a senior manager.

## Complaints

120. The great majority of inspections are carried out without any concerns on the part of the authority. If concerns do arise during an inspection, the lead inspector should consider the concern and do everything they can to address the problem.
121. If the person making the complaint is not satisfied with the lead inspector's response, they should be invited to raise the matter with the quality assurance manager. If it is still not resolved or if they wish to take the complaint further, the lead inspector or quality assurance manager should fully inform them about the procedure for making complaints.
122. 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070080). Lodging a complaint will not normally delay the publication of the final inspection letter.
123. Complaints should be made in writing (including by email to [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)) to:

Sue Aldridge  
Principal Officer, Complaints  
Ofsted National Business Unit  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD.

## Annex A. Identifying children and young people to include in the sample

On day one of the inspection, the lead inspector will ask the local authority to compile child-level data from their internal electronic records. These data will then be used to choose a sample of cases for the inspectors to track.

The local authority should provide information on the groups of children and young people listed below. Data is only to be provided where it is applicable, for example, not all contact records will have all the data listed under 'Child details' so only what has been recorded is required. The specific data required for each child, where available, is stated below in brackets relating to Table 1:

- all those who have been the subject of a contact in the three months prior to inspection (sections 1 and 2)
- all those who have been the subject of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), or an equivalent assessment, in the three months prior to inspection (sections 1 and 3)
- all those who have been the subject of a referral in the three months prior to inspection (sections 1 and 5)
- all those in receipt of services as a child in need at the point of inspection (sections 1, 4 and 7)
- all those subject to a child protection plan at the point of inspection (sections 1, 4 and 6)
- all those who have ceased to receive support, either as a child in need or as a child subject to a child protection plan, in the three months prior to inspection (sections 1, 6 and 7).

**Table 1. Details on the data required**

Section	Subject	Fields
1	Child details	Child Unique ID Gender Ethnicity Date of birth Legal status (if any) Details of any disability
2	Contacts	Contact date Contact source
3	CAF or equivalent assessment	CAF/Other completion date Organisation completing
4	Case allocation details	Allocated team Allocated worker Case unallocated (Yes or No)

5	Referrals	Referral date Referral source Type of referral (S47 or S17) Re-referral (Yes or No)
6	Child protection	Date of initial child protection conference Date became subject of a child protection plan Date ceased to be subject of a child protection plan Subject to emergency protection/care or supervision order/protected under police powers in last six months (Yes or No)
7	Children in receipt of services under section 17 (child in need)	Date services commenced Date services ceased

Ideally, these data would be provided in a single spreadsheet. You can find an example spreadsheet on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20120004](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20120004).

However, we appreciate that this is not always the easiest option for local authorities. Some of the required data – particularly in relation to ‘Contacts’ and ‘CAF or equivalent assessments’ – are not necessarily recorded on the main ICT systems. The local authority’s preferred way to provide the data might be a series of spreadsheets. The local authority is free to use the solution that suits it best and enables it to provide the data in the timeframe requested. Whatever the format, the data should be clearly identifiable.

### **Additional, locally held, information required for the inspection**

The lead inspector will also ask for:

- the local authority children’s services organisational structure, including: lines of accountability; case management and workflow arrangements; protocols for transfer of cases between different teams; and the number of cases awaiting transfer
- evidence of the impact and analysis of CAF or equivalent assessment activity over the last 12 months
- any other analysis of data in relation to the early help, identification and protection of children.
- copies of any quality assurance activity, multi-agency and single agency case audits over the six months prior to inspection, and action plans in relation to early help, identification and protection of children
- details of agreed threshold criteria for child protection services
- arrangements to safeguard the welfare of privately fostered children and numbers of privately fostered children known to the authority

- a workforce profile of social work staff working with children in need and children subject to child protection plans at the point of inspection (This includes: the number of qualified social workers and their relevant experience; the number of vacancies for permanent staff; the number of locum/agency staff; the extent of staff turnover/stability and sickness levels; and average caseloads of staff.)
- evidence to demonstrate how feedback from children, young people, families, and front-line staff both individually and collectively, is asked for, is taken into account and, where appropriate, impacts on practice, strategy, service development and design
- evidence to demonstrate how the outcomes of complaints have contributed to improvement in help and protection
- minutes of the last three LSCB meetings
- evidence of LSCB multi-agency training and its impact
- a list of children and young people (for whom the local authority is responsible) who are in any form of Alternative Educational Provision, other than at a registered Pupil Referral Unit, with the date of placement of the child and the amount of education/training received by the child
- the local strategic needs analysis, and shared local strategy to address this, in relation to early help and the protection of children, including, for example, numbers of children living in homes where there is known substance misuse, mental ill health of a parent/carer and/or domestic violence
- details of multi-agency meetings during the fieldwork period, such as initial and review child protection conferences, core groups and any planned strategy meetings. The lead inspector will indicate the geographical areas to be covered. This will be reviewed on a regular basis between the lead inspector and the local authority.

## Annex B. Email to the Director of Children's Services

Insert date:

Dear **[insert name of Director of Children's Services]**:

Inspection of local authority arrangements to protect children – **[insert name of council]**

This letter is to inform you that Ofsted is today beginning an inspection of arrangements to protect children. I have tried to contact you by telephone first thing this morning, but this has not proved possible. However, I have spoken to **[insert name and title of manager]** and informed him/her that we are about to begin the inspection, in line with the guidance published on our website.

We will be visiting offices to talk to staff, read files and consider and observe front-line practice. We would like to make arrangements for the remainder of the inspection tomorrow morning **[insert day and date]**. I should be grateful if you or a relevant senior officer would contact me on **[insert mobile telephone number]** to agree a convenient time and venue for this to take place. If you have any queries about this inspection, please feel free to contact me at any time during the inspection.

In addition, all inspections are subject to a quality assurance process undertaken by a named quality assurance manager. If there are any issues the inspection team cannot resolve, you may wish to discuss these in the first instance with the manager for this inspection. This person is **[insert name]** and can be contacted on **[insert number]**.

Yours sincerely

**[insert name]** HMI  
Lead inspector

## **Annex C. Information for staff in agencies being inspected**

### **Ofsted inspections of arrangements for the protection of children**

#### **Introduction**

This inspection is to evaluate the effectiveness of early intervention, help and protection for the children, young people and families in your local authority. Full details about the inspection are available in the *Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children* and the *Inspections of arrangements for the protection of children: evaluation schedule and grade descriptors*.

Inspectors will be sensitive to the potential pressures on, and the apprehension of, staff being interviewed. The purpose of the inspection is not to make judgements about individuals.

The contact details of the inspectors are detailed below should you wish to make contact to discuss any issues outside the interview.

Evidence will be gathered through a variety of means, including:

- reading case files
- directly observing practice
- attending meetings
- shadowing staff
- interviewing staff and partners
- meeting with key partners
- meeting with children, young people and their parents and carers.

Inspectors will spend time with social care staff to:

- observe practice
- assess the quality of work to help and protect children, young people and families.

Inspectors will meet with senior managers throughout the fieldwork to ensure they understand the emerging findings. At the end of the inspection, the final overall judgements will reflect the body of evidence collated and evaluated by the inspection team. They will also have been subject to scrutiny and discussion with the quality assurance manager.

Feedback to the local authority at the end of the fieldwork will be chaired and managed by the lead inspector. The Director of Children's Services, or their

representative, will always be present and will determine who else to invite, which could include other managers, the lead member and the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Following the inspection, the lead inspector will write a report about the findings of the inspection. The inspection report will be sent to the local authority to check factual accuracy and will be published on the Ofsted website five weeks after the end of the inspection.

Thank you for your assistance with this inspection.

Confidentiality will be preserved wherever possible.

Ofsted inspectors are currently conducting an inspection of child protection services in this authority. If you wish to speak to an inspector please contact:

Name of inspector(s):.....

Mobile number:.....

## Annex D. Evaluating the effectiveness of individual children's case files

### Case file inspection tool

This tool can be used to record evidence during case file reading. It brings together the key relevant criteria from the evaluation schedule.

The evaluative summary will be recorded on the SEA (Summary of Evidence and Analysis).

Suggested evidence recording reference	Case number	Inspector evaluation
7, 13	Risk is identified, responded to and reduced	
14, 15	Involvement of children, young people and families in the process	
24	Quality of decision-making	
22	Quality of assessment and help	
23	Quality of planning and review	
26	Quality of information sharing	
18, 25	Evidence of management oversight	
12, 26	Effectiveness of coordination between agencies	
10	Consideration of ethnicity, culture, religion, language or disability	
25	Quality of case recording	
7	Evidence of impact/improved outcomes	

## Annex E. Evaluating the effectiveness of directly observed practice

### Observation of practice inspection tool

This tool can be used to record evidence during practice observations. It brings together the key relevant criteria from the evaluation schedule.

The evaluative summary will be recorded on the SEA (Summary of Evidence and Analysis).

Suggested evidence recording reference	Criteria	Inspector evaluation
20, 27, 28	Attendance and participation (families and professionals including advocacy)	
7, 15	The focus on the child	
8, 9, 15	Quality of the communication with the child and family, evidence of relationship building and appropriate use of empathy and challenge	
7	Risk is identified, responded to and reduced	
8, 9	Involvement of children, young people and families in the process including their understanding	
23, 24	Quality of decision-making is effective and timely	
22	Quality of assessment and help	
23	Quality of planning and review	
20	Quality of information sharing	
12, 27	Effectiveness of coordination between agencies	
10	Consideration of ethnicity, culture, religion, language or disability	
8	Children, young people and their families feel they have been effectively helped	

## **Annex F. Information to prepare children, young people and families**

### **Ofsted inspections of arrangements to protect children**

This document outlines for local authority staff how Ofsted inspectors will engage with children, young people, and their families and carers during the inspection.

It is anticipated that local authority staff will use this to prepare children, young people and families, and that Ofsted inspectors will always follow these principles during the inspection.

#### **Information for children young people and families**

You will always be asked before any meeting with your social worker and others whether an inspector has asked to be there. You will always be asked whether you are happy for the inspector to be there and/or to meet with them – it is your right to do so, or not. You can also change your mind.

Inspectors may sit in to observe meetings or meet separately with you and other children, young people and families. When they do this, they are looking to see how well agencies and workers are working together to help children like you and their families. When they talk to you, they will want to hear how well you think you have been listened to. They will want to see how well the local authority is doing at keeping you safe and how you are being helped.

Inspectors are not there to check up on your family and you do not have to share any personal information with them.

Anything that an inspector hears or sees is confidential and will not be shared outside the inspection team. You do not have to give them any personal details that you do not wish to share. If you talk to an inspector about your social worker, they will not tell them what you said unless you say that it is alright for them to do so. The only exception to this is if they think that you or others are being harmed in some way.

At the end of the inspection, the inspectors write a report (this will not name you or anyone in your family). This is then sent to the local authority and is also published on the Ofsted website. The inspector isn't able to tell you all individually what their judgement was at the end of the inspection, but you can read the report online (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/children-and-families-services/for-parents-and-carers/find-children-and-families-services-inspection>) or your social worker or support worker will be able to tell you what the inspection report said.

## **Annex G. Template letter for children, young people and families**

Dear Parent/Carer

**Re: xxxxx Council, Inspection of arrangements to protect children – your involvement**

I am the inspection team leader and I write to invite you to meet or have a telephone conversation with a member of the team to help us with our work in reviewing and evaluating the quality of services provided by those working with children and young people in xxxxxx.

This inspection will involve the team and I interviewing a range of professionals and volunteers and reading a lot of information. However, it is also really important that we speak with parents and children so that we can fully understand your perspectives and experiences.

With your permission, the inspectors may want to sit in to observe meetings or meet separately with you and other children, young people and families. When they do this, they are looking to see how well agencies and workers are working together to help children and their families. When they talk to you, they will want to hear how well you think you have been listened to. They will want to see how well the local authority is doing at keeping you safe and how you are being helped.

Inspectors are not there to check up on your family and you do not have to share any personal information with them. We will ensure that nothing that we write or talk about will in any way lead to you being identified.

At the end of the inspection, the inspectors write a report (this will not name you or anyone in your family). This is then sent to the local authority and is also published on the Ofsted website. The inspector isn't able to tell you all individually what the outcome was at the end of the inspection, but you can read the report online (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/children-and-families-services/for-parents-and-carers/find-children-and-families-services-inspection>) or your social worker or support worker will be able to tell you what the inspection report said.

We really want to talk to you and I hope this letter will reassure you and enable you to agree to talking and/or meeting with us.

If you have any further concerns, please either telephone (on the number below) or email me at xxxx. I always do my best to respond promptly but forgive me if there is a short delay at this busy time of inspection.

Yours faithfully

Lead inspector