

Inspection of Sure Start Children's Centres

Consultation document

This is a consultation document on proposals for a revised framework for the inspection of Sure Start Children's Centres. Ofsted seeks the widest possible range of views from those who have an interest in, or expertise relating to, children's centres to ensure that the framework takes proper account of the needs and circumstances of all interested parties. Above all, the framework must assure the quality of services for all young children and families who use children's centre provision and promote their continuing improvement.

The closing date for the consultation is 11 January 2013.

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Age group: 0–5

Published: October 2012

Reference no: 120326



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361

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

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Contents

About Ofsted	4
Purpose and background to the consultation	4
Proposals for inspecting children's centres	5
The consultation process	11
Questionnaire for the inspection of Sure Start Children's Centres	12
What did you think of this consultation?	19
Additional questions about you	21

About Ofsted

1. 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.

Purpose and background to the consultation

2. This consultation seeks your views on proposals for a revised framework for the inspection of Sure Start Children's Centres¹. Your views will help to refine and develop the framework.
3. The law requires Ofsted to inspect Sure Start Children's Centres at intervals decided by the Secretary of State. Inspections must cover how centres help families with young children, and those expecting children, to access the services they need to help children have a good start in life. In particular, inspections must consider how centres encourage those families who are most in need of intervention and support to use those services.
4. Since introducing the current inspection framework in April 2010, there have been changes in the government's 'vision' for children's centres and the way in which local authorities have chosen to commission and deliver services from children's centres. As well as raising expectations through our inspections, we are also proposing to revise our inspection framework to take account of those changes.
5. We also wish to make inspections sharper and more focused on the aspects that make the greatest difference to families who are identified as most in need of intervention and support. We are proposing the following:
 - a single inspection and report where local authorities organise their centres in groups that share management
 - simultaneous inspections where local authorities organise their centres in groups that work collaboratively together and share services
 - the inspection of single centres where local authorities continue to use this model
 - revised inspection criteria
 - fewer judgements
 - revised inspection grades

¹ The law defines Sure Start Children's Centres. For the purposes of this document they are referred to as children's centres.

- shorter reports with a short summary
 - retention of the optional Ofsted self-evaluation form.
6. We intend to test these proposals through pilots in a variety of centres and groups of centres during the autumn. We will use the information gathered from these pilots and from a number of consultation events to finalise the revised arrangements for inspection. Consultation events will include:
- an online consultation
 - a parents' panel survey
 - an external reference group of organisations involved in children's centres
 - presentations, meetings and other events such as parent focus groups at a number of children's centres.
7. We will evaluate the responses received from this consultation alongside the feedback gathered from the events. At the end of the consultation period, we will publish the main findings from the consultation on our website.

Proposals for inspecting children's centres

Inspecting a group of children's centres

Groups that share management

8. We know that many local authorities have moved away from commissioning a single centre to serve one community and now group their centres across a number of communities (usually linked geographically). This allows centres in those groups to offer a wider range of services, to pool resources and to specialise in particular services made accessible across a larger area. These models of delivery are often referred to as clusters, 'hub and spoke' models, or locality models.
9. We propose that where a local authority has moved to a group model that shares leadership and management, we will inspect the group of centres together and produce one report for the local authority that brings out the strengths and areas for improvement of the group as a whole. We have already sought the necessary advice and agreement from the Department for Education that will allow us to change the way we inspect. The arrangements for this will be set out in a remit letter from the Secretary of State for Education that is expected to be in place in by April 2013, subject to the results of the consultation and Parliamentary approval.

Groups that work collaboratively

10. Some local authorities arrange their children's centres to work collaboratively to deliver services, even though they may not have shared management. Where

this is the case we propose that we inspect such centres simultaneously and produce separate reports for each centre.

Single centres

11. Where local authorities choose to continue to commission children's centres to work alone, we will continue to inspect and report on these individual centres.
12. However centres are organised, we also propose that we carry out a number of inspections simultaneously across a local authority. This will allow us to deploy a larger team of inspectors with a broader range of expertise than currently, to inspect a number of children's centres operating individually or as groups across a geographical area. This has the potential to reduce the number of meetings needed with local authorities and key partners, and avoid any unnecessary duplication.

We propose to develop a flexible framework that allows inspection of a group of centres who share leadership and management, and separate inspections of those that work collaboratively or alone.

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should have a flexible framework that allows inspections of a group of centres, as well as individual centres?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

We propose to carry out a number of inspections simultaneously to reduce duplication of meetings and inspection activities.

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should carry out inspections simultaneously across a geographical area wherever possible?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

Inspection judgements

13. We propose to reduce significantly the number of judgements we make during inspection from 20 to three key judgements, and a judgement for overall effectiveness.
14. The three key judgements that will apply in all inspections of children's centres are:
 - access to services by young children and their families

- the quality and impact of practice and services
 - the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management.
15. These judgements will contribute to an overall effectiveness judgement for the centre or group of centres.

We propose to reduce the number of key judgements we make during inspection.

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should reduce the number of inspection judgements we make from 20 to three, with another judgement for overall effectiveness?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

Inspection criteria

16. The revised framework will focus on:
- how an individual centre or group of centres identifies the families with young children who are most in need of intervention and support
 - how centres decide on the needs of those families and the types of services and activities that will best meet their needs
 - the appropriateness and quality of the targeted services and support being offered
 - how centres encourage families who are most in need but least likely to access services
 - how centres safeguard children and vulnerable adults
 - the quality of the partnership working, for example with parents, health, adult training and employment, other centres and any other partners who provide essential services
 - the quality of leadership, governance and management, including the effectiveness of self-evaluation of a centre or group of centres
 - the contribution of the centre or group of centres to improving outcomes for young children and their families in the community(ies)
 - the use of appropriate and ambitious performance and outcome measures. These will be based on evidence and data for the community(ies) being served and any national and local performance measures agreed with the local authority.

We propose to use the criteria identified above to underpin the three key inspection judgements.

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the inspection criteria identified in paragraph 16 cover the right areas?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

Inspection judgements

17. Access to good quality early years experiences helps children get the start they need and the benefits of those experiences last well into a child's school life. We think that every family using children's centres deserves to use services that are at least good; especially those families that are most in need of intervention and support.
18. Any centre that is not good should improve in order to provide the services that families need, and the experiences that will help all children develop. This is especially important where children require early help or targeted services.
19. We propose therefore to replace the current judgement of 'satisfactory' with 'requires improvement' and to use a four-point scale for each of the inspection judgements, as follows:
 - outstanding
 - good
 - requires improvement
 - inadequate.
20. We intend to describe what good provision means in the evaluation schedule so that children's centres, local authorities, inspectors and other interested people such as centre users know what has to be achieved in order to be at least good.

We propose to use a four-point grading scale for each judgement inspectors make. The four grades are outstanding; good; requires improvement and inadequate.

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these grades (outstanding; good; requires improvement and inadequate) are the right ones?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

21. We will continue to carry out a second inspection of centres that are judged inadequate within 12 months.
22. We also propose to re-inspect more quickly than currently a proportion of centres that require improvement subject to the availability of resources. Local authorities have responsibility for the quality of their children's centres and must produce and monitor an action plan in relation to each inspection. We propose to target re-inspection in those local authorities that have the highest proportion of centres judged to 'require improvement' and to focus those inspections on the effectiveness of the action plans.

We intend to target re-inspection of centres judged to 'require improvement' in those local authorities that have the highest proportion of centres at this grade and to focus those inspections on the effectiveness of the centre's action plan.

Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that this approach is the right one?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

Inspection reports

23. After each inspection, the inspectors will produce a report which will be published on Ofsted's website.
 - Where inspectors inspect an individual standalone centre, the report will cover the strengths and areas for improvement for that centre.
 - Where inspectors report on a group of centres that share management, inspectors will focus on the main strengths and areas of improvement for the group. This is because we want to show how well a group of centres are working together to deliver services across an area that is wider than an area for an individual centre.
 - Where a group of centres work together collaboratively but do not share management, inspectors will report on each individual centre.
24. Each report, whether of a group or individual centres, will have a user-friendly summary that parents may use when deciding whether to access services at a centre or group of centres. Each report will include recommendations that set out what actions the local authority and/or the centre or group of centres need to take to improve, especially for those centres that are not yet good.

Where centres share management, we propose to produce one inspection report covering a group of centres so that parents, centre leaders and staff, and local authorities can see how well the group works as a whole.

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should produce one report for a group of centres that shares management?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

Self-evaluation

25. The ability of children's centres to reflect on and evaluate what they do remains at the heart of their improvement.
26. Children's centre leaders tell us that they often have to complete multiple self-evaluation forms, especially where they manage a group of centres and/or have registered childcare and/or are also a school for inspection purposes. We know that leaders of services already complete some form of self-evaluation as part of the cycle of improvement.
27. We do not want centres to complete additional self-evaluation or multiple forms where centres work together. We want centres to continue to work with all their partners, especially parents, to evaluate and improve what they do. Inspectors will seek evidence of this as part of the inspection.
28. We propose to revise the format of the self-evaluation form so that it matches the evaluation schedule being introduced. Completion of the Ofsted self-evaluation form is not mandatory, but many providers have told us that it is a useful format as it allows them to assess themselves against the matters that inspectors consider at inspection. We propose to continue to provide a non-mandatory self-evaluation form for centres. They may use this flexibly, either across a group of centres or individually.

We expect to see some form of self-evaluation by centres and propose to continue to make a self-evaluation form available for children's centres to complete individually or as a group of centres if they wish.

Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should continue to make a self-evaluation form available?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

The consultation process

We welcome your responses to this consultation paper. The consultation remains open until 11 January 2013.

There are three ways to complete and submit the questionnaire and any other comments.

Online electronic questionnaire

Visit our website to complete and submit an electronic version of the questionnaire: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ofsted-ccen2012>.

Print and post

Visit our website to print a Word or PDF version of the questionnaire that can be filled in by hand: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120326. When you have completed the questionnaire, please post it to:

Joint consultation for children's centres and early years provision
Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Download and email

Visit our website to download a Word version of the questionnaire that you can complete on your computer: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120326. When you have completed the questionnaire, please email it to: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk with 'Joint consultation' in the subject line.

Questionnaire for the inspection of Sure Start Children's Centres

Confidentiality

The information you provide will be held by us. It will only be used for the purposes of consultation and research to help us to become more effective, shape policies and inform inspection and regulatory practice.

We will treat your identity in confidence, if you disclose it to us. However, we may publish an organisation's views.

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Yes please complete Section 1

No please complete Section 2

Section 1

If you are completing the consultation on behalf of an organisation and would like us to consider publishing the views of your organisation, please indicate this below.

Organisation: _____

Section 2

Which of the below best describes you? Please tick one option.

I am:

a children's centre user	<input type="checkbox"/>	a representative of a local authority	<input type="checkbox"/>
a children's centre leader/manager	<input type="checkbox"/>	a voluntary organisation providing commissioned services for children's centres	<input type="checkbox"/>
a children's centre practitioner	<input type="checkbox"/>	a representative of a government department	<input type="checkbox"/>
a governor or advisory board member	<input type="checkbox"/>	an employee of Ofsted	<input type="checkbox"/>
a school		a partner organisation working with/ delivering services through a children's centre	

a member of Ofsted's parents' panel	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tell us)			

The consultation questions

For each of the following questions, please select the option that most closely fits your view and include any additional comments in the boxes provided.

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should have a flexible framework that allows inspections of a group of centres, as well as individual centres?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should carry out inspections simultaneously across a geographical area wherever possible?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should reduce the number of inspection judgements we make from 20 to three, with another judgement for overall effectiveness?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the inspection criteria identified in paragraph 16 cover the right areas?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the four grades (outstanding; good; requires improvement and inadequate) are the right ones?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments

Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should re-inspect centres judged to 'require improvement' in the local authorities that have the highest proportion of centres with this grade and to focus those inspections on the effectiveness of the action plan that local authorities must produce following an inspection?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should produce one report for a group of centres that shares management?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments

Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should continue to make a self-evaluation form available?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments

Q9. Do you have any further comments? Please leave them here.

What did you think of this consultation?

One of the commitments in our strategic plan is to monitor whether our consultations are accessible to those wishing to take part.

Please tell us what you thought of this consultation by answering the questions below.

	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Don't know
I found the consultation information clear and easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I found the consultation easy to find on the Ofsted website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had enough information about the consultation topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would take part in a future Ofsted consultation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How did you hear about this consultation?

- Ofsted website
- Ofsted News*
- Ofsted's email alerts service
- Ofsted conference
- Another organisation (please specify, if known)
- Other (please specify)

Is there anything you would like us to improve on or do differently for future consultations? If so, please tell us below.

Thank you for taking part in our consultation.

Additional questions about you

Your answers to the following questions will help us to evaluate how successfully we are communicating messages from inspection to all sections of society. **We would like to assure you that all responses are confidential and you do not have to answer every question.**

Please tick the appropriate box.

1. Gender

Female <input type="checkbox"/>	Male <input type="checkbox"/>
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2. Age

Under 14 <input type="checkbox"/>	14–18 <input type="checkbox"/>	19–24 <input type="checkbox"/>	25–34 <input type="checkbox"/>	35–44 <input type="checkbox"/>	45–54 <input type="checkbox"/>	55–64 <input type="checkbox"/>	65+ <input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Ethnic origin

a) How would you describe your national group?

British or mixed British	<input type="checkbox"/>	English	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

b) How would you describe your ethnic group?

Asian		Mixed ethnic origin	
Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black African and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Caribbean and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other Asian background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other mixed ethnic background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black		White	
African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any White background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other ethnic background	
Any other Black background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese			
Any Chinese background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

4. Sexual orientation

Heterosexual <input type="checkbox"/>	Lesbian <input type="checkbox"/>	Gay <input type="checkbox"/>	Bisexual <input type="checkbox"/>
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5. Religion/Belief

Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other, please state:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>		

6. Disability

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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