

What children said about how fostering services 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 fostering services 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 fostering services.

We do our inspections to check how good services are for children and young people. When we inspect fostering services, our inspectors talk with staff, children, young people and foster carers, to find out whether children and young people in foster care are being looked after properly.

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 fostering services. We are also thinking about how we decide how well a fostering service is doing its job. We call the documents that say all this our 'framework' for inspecting fostering services.

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

We met some children to discuss our ideas with them. We also asked children and young people on the Children's Rights Director's Be Heard Panel to give us their views. We asked the panel 'Have you ever been in foster care?' and 'What do you think is the most important thing about foster care?'

Altogether, 204 children and young people gave us their views, and 144 of these said they had been in foster care. One hundred and seventy-three children answered our online questionnaire. 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.

One young person said:

'Just make sure that they are doing their job properly, and that they help the children to be the best that they can be'.

This is what we will try to do.

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 fostered?

Out of the 173 children and young people who answered the online questionnaire, 108 told us it's really important and 145 told us it's quite important to ask the views of children and young people who are fostered.

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

'It's about their life. They live it, they know what works and what needs improving.'

'You really need to know because its important for you to know how the kids feel in foster care because you want to see how safe we are and that we are getting everything that we need'.

'It helps to make things better'.

'To make sure the children are safe and happy where they have been placed'.

'If you don't ask children how will you know what we think?'

2. We want to tell fostering services that we will be inspecting them 10 days before the inspection. Is this the right amount of time?

Out of the 169 children and young people who answered this question, 61 said yes, this is the right amount of time, and 60 said the fostering service shouldn't know at all before it is inspected. Some children and young people also gave mixed comments about giving more or less notice.

Comments from those who thought 10 days is the right amount of time are given below.

'It is not too much time, nor too little so things cannot be faked'.

'Because they need time to get ready and it wouldn't be fair to surprise them, but if I said they are being cruel you should surprise them to catch them'.

'Because it will help them to set up this inspection and it is really important to get set up'.

Here are some of the views from children and young people who disagreed with the idea of giving 10 days' notice.

'Because it should be like that everyday not just when it is inspected'.

'They can prepare and try to show you things that don't really happen most of the time, that is why things don't get better for anybody'.

'Then there will be a true inspection of what is happening. Things will not have been staged'.

During the face to face meetings with children and young people, they felt very strongly that no notice should be given before an inspection and said they would be happy to be contacted by an inspector and asked for their views with no notice.

3. Do you agree that fostering services which are very good should be inspected less often than the ones that aren't so good?

Sixty-two children and young people who answered our online questionnaire agreed that very good services should be inspected less often. Eighty-three disagreed, 25 were not sure, and 3 didn't answer. A number of children and young people told us it was important that fostering services are treated fairly and the same as each other.

Children and young people who said yes to this question said:

'Why waste time on the good ones, you should concentrate on the ones that need help'.

'Because obviously the ones that aren't so good need regular feedback on how they are doing'.

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

'Because someone is good in their inspection it does not mean they are consistently good'.

'I think all fostering services should be inspected the same as things can change in time'.

'Its not about the fostering services, it's about the children so they should all be inspected at the same time as often as each other'.

4. What should inspectors judge fostering services on?

We asked some questions about what inspectors should think about when they decide how well a fostering service is doing. Most children and young people agreed with all of the things we said we would make our judgements on, but some also said it would have been helpful to have more information about what we were asking.

The number of children who agreed with each of the things we suggested is below.

What we will base our judgement on	Number of children and young people who agreed
How well children progress	134
How good their service is	136
How safe children are	156
How well the service is managed	135

We wanted to know if there was anything else that inspectors should judge the fostering service on. There were 95 responses to this question. Children and young people told us to judge the following things:

'How well they (foster carers) treat the children, whether they can build relationships with the children. If they give them advice when it is needed. Whether they listen to their views and help them to make the right decisions'

'How long till the final Judge says what is happening'

'The health and happiness of the children as well as general progress'

'Should look at the education progress of children'.

5. Do you have any other comments about how we should inspect fostering services?

There were 96 answers to this question, but many of the children and young people just told us they had no other comments to make. Out of the 36 comments given, some of the important messages were:

'Don't be fooled by what is presented to you, look beyond just what is presented to you'

'Check all aspects and find out how the foster carer feels as well as the child'

'Ask the schools about children in foster care. How well they are doing at their school and how their behaviour is while they are in foster care'

'Less paper work because I don't get the attention on me because of this paper work. I came into care when I was five and now I'm 15 and still in care, going to stay with my carer forever I hope'.

Other things children and young people told us about foster care

Children and young people gave us lots of really helpful comments and views in the online questionnaires, at meetings and by text message. We have tried to use as many as possible in this report, but as we can't include them all, we have picked out some quotes that explain really well what children and young people told us when we asked:

What are the most important things to you about being in foster care?

'Having information about the families where you are placed so you know what is expected of you but also so you know about the family, what they like, what they are scared of and when their birthdays are. This can help you feel like you belong'.

'Being listened to, having a choice about where you are placed'.

'Being treated fairly so that all children in the family feel included and you're not made to feel different or unwanted'.

'Have foster carers that love you and care for you'.

'How you get on with your foster carers, feeling comfy, happy, and safe'.

'I have been in foster care and I would say the most important thing about being in foster care is that you are always safe and get a say in pretty much everything'.

'I have been in foster care for most part of my life and I would have to say the most important thing is being with a support foster family'.

What did adults say to us?

The adults who took part in the consultation were foster carers and other people who work in fostering services or local authorities (like social workers).

Generally, everyone who replied was pleased that, when we inspect fostering services, the most important thing will be children and young people's experiences in foster care and what happens for them.

The adults strongly agreed that the views and safety of children and young people in foster care were very important and should be a big part of the inspection.

Over half of the adults who replied agreed that we should tell fostering services 10 days before the inspection that we are coming to inspect them. However, they

wanted us to make sure that all children and young people have the opportunity to give their views before and during the inspection.

When we asked adults about inspecting very good fostering services less often than the ones that aren't so good, 88 agreed that it was a good idea. One hundred and seventy-two adults answered this question and 61 of them disagreed.

Adults said it was important that inspectors, not fostering services, choose who they speak to at inspections and that this should be done fairly. They said that people should be allowed to say what they think without giving their names.

Adults were also asked about how we should report on equality and diversity in the inspection report. Out of the 169 people who replied, 142 said inspectors should write about how well a fostering service works for equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination all through the report, instead of having a separate section.

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 fostering services*. You can find it at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110143.

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 fostered 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 fostering services 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 fostering services 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, foster carers 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 fostering services all about it. We are also making a short video for children and young people to make sure they know how they can be involved in inspections. We will put it on our website when it's ready.

Thank you!

Thank you to all 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 fostering services help children and young people to be the best they can be.