

Inspection of adoption support agencies

The inspection framework, evaluation schedule and grade descriptors

This document sets out the framework for the inspection of adoption support agencies and sets out the criteria and judgements that will be in use from April 2015. It should be read alongside the 'Inspection handbook: adoption support agencies'.

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Introduction

1. This document sets out the framework, evaluation schedule and grade descriptors for inspections of adoption support agencies undertaken by Ofsted. It explains:
 - how we apply the principles and processes underlying all our inspections
 - the statutory basis for inspection
 - the main features of the inspection process.
2. The evaluation schedule outlines the main aspects of the service and outcomes against which inspectors will make judgements. It also outlines the grade descriptors that inspectors will use in arriving at their judgements.
3. Ofsted's general principles of inspection and regulation are to:
 - support and promote improvement
 - be proportionate
 - focus on the needs of service users¹
 - focus on the needs of providers
 - be transparent and consistent
 - be accountable
 - demonstrate value for money.
4. More detailed guidance about the inspection is included in the inspection handbook for adoption support agencies.

Legal basis for inspection

5. The legal basis for the regulation of adoption support agencies is set out in the 'Care Standards Act 2000' and the 'Adoption and Children Act 2002'.^{2,3} Section 9 of the 'Adoption and Children Act 2002' allows for regulations to be made in relation to adoption support agencies. Section 8 of the 'Adoption and Children Act 2002' sets out a definition of an adoption support agency. Ofsted's powers to register, inspect and, where necessary, enforce compliance with statutory requirements and relevant regulations are set out in the 'Care Standards Act 2000'.

¹ This term is used throughout this document to encompass all users: children, young people and adults.

² 'Care Standards Act 2000'; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14.

³ 'Adoption and Children Act 2002'; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/38/contents.

6. When inspecting adoption support agencies, Ofsted gives consideration to knowledge and understanding gained from previous inspections and to relevant legislation, including:
 - the 'Care Standards Act 2000'
 - the 'Adoption and Children Act 2002'
 - the relevant regulations
 - 'Adoption: national minimum standards'⁴
 - Department for Education statutory guidance
 - the 'Equality Act 2010'⁵
 - 'Working together to safeguard children'.⁶

7. The 'Education and Inspections Act 2006' requires Ofsted to perform its function as the regulator of adoption support agencies, for the general purpose of encouraging the services it inspects and regulates to:⁷
 - improve
 - focus on the experience of those who use the service
 - be efficient and effective in the use of resources.

Frequency of inspection

8. The frequency of inspection is set out in regulations.⁸ All adoption support agencies have at least one inspection in each three-year inspection cycle.

9. The timing of an inspection is influenced by an assessment of:
 - the outcomes of previous inspections
 - any current complaints or enforcement action
 - notifications received from the adoption support agency
 - other relevant information received by Ofsted.

10. Where an adoption support agency has been judged inadequate, we re-inspect the agency within six to 12 months.

⁴ 'Adoption: national minimum standards', Department for Education, 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-national-minimum-standards.

⁵ Equality Act 2010; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents.

⁶ 'Working together to safeguard children', Department for Education, 2013; www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children.

⁷ Education and Inspections Act 2006; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents.

⁸ Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Children's Homes etc.) (Amendment) Regulations SI 2007/694, **as amended**.

11. Additional inspections may occur. These are dependent on information received, concerns that have arisen and risks to people using the adoption support agency.

Types of inspection

12. Ofsted carries out the following types of inspection in adoption support agencies.
 - A scheduled inspection is carried out at least once in each three-year cycle. This inspection is conducted against the evaluation schedule and will result in a set of graded judgements.
 - A monitoring inspection may be carried out if there is an incident, complaint or concern regarding an agency.
 - A survey inspection (also known as a thematic inspection) may be carried out to gather evidence on a particular theme, issue or aspect of best practice that Ofsted is examining with the intention of publishing a report on the findings. This could be conducted as part of a scheduled inspection or separately as part of Ofsted's programme of surveys. We will not conduct a survey inspection at the same time as a monitoring inspection.

Notice given for inspection

13. Agencies receive 10 working days' notice of a scheduled inspection, unless they are individuals working alone providing an adoption support service, in which case they will receive 20 working days' notice. This is in accordance with our policy of giving as little notice as possible while recognising the nature of adoption agencies and enabling them to identify service users who would be willing to talk with the inspector.

Inspectors

14. Adoption support agencies are inspected by experienced and trained social care inspectors.

How the regulations and national minimum standards inform inspection judgements

15. Inspection is intended to help raise standards and support improvement in the sector. This requires Ofsted to focus on the experience and progress of and outcomes for service users. The framework and the inspection judgements are underpinned by the regulations, the national minimum standards and statutory guidance. Compliance with these requirements, however, will not necessarily lead to a good, or outstanding, judgement. Inspectors will use the descriptors of good as the benchmark against which to grade and judge performance.

16. The introduction to the national minimum standards for adoption support agencies states that:

'Each standard is preceded by a statement of the outcome to be achieved by the agency... Agencies will normally show they are meeting the headline statement of the outcome by following the standards below. However, these do not have to be followed exactly if the agency can demonstrate, and Ofsted is satisfied, that the outcomes are being met in a different way. The exception is where standards refer to a requirement set out in regulations, in which case the regulation must be met.'

17. The strengths and weaknesses of the agency will be highlighted throughout the report to illustrate how inspectors have arrived at their judgement. Adoption support agencies are required to meet regulations. Where regulations are not met, Ofsted has a range of enforcement powers to bring non-compliance to the provider's attention and will use the most proportionate enforcement option. Options include setting a requirement in a report, or issuing a compliance notice that details what the provider needs to do to become compliant. If there are areas for improvement, inspectors will make recommendations which help the provider to meet the standards and ensure good experience, progress and outcomes for service users. If providers fail to meet regulations or observe standards, inspectors will take this into account when making judgements. They will also take into account the impact on service users.

Limiting judgements

18. A judgement of inadequate for any of the judgements will always lead to a judgement of inadequate for the overall effectiveness grade.

Making judgements and using the grade descriptors

19. The experience and progress of service users are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect.
20. The framework aims to ensure that inspection focuses on the issues that make the most difference to service users and helps to raise standards and support improvement in the sector. The inspection framework recognises adoption support as an evolving and lifelong process for all those involved and inspectors will consider the impact of the agency, as appropriate, on adopted adults, birth relatives and adoptive families as well as on children and young people.
21. Inspectors will make their judgements on a four-point scale:
 - outstanding
 - good
 - requires improvement

- inadequate.
22. The framework sets out the characteristics of a good adoption support agency for all judgement areas. Inspectors use these criteria to evaluate the experience and progress of service users. Inspectors make a judgement of good where the characteristics set out are widespread across the agency and are leading to positive progress and experience for people using the service. Inspectors use professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings for children and young people. A judgement of good is made where the inspector concludes that the evidence overall sits most appropriately with a finding of good.
 23. The Department for Education also publishes national minimum standards. Where providers do not take account of the national minimum standards, this may indicate a failure to comply with the regulations and is likely to indicate poor practice. This will influence the inspection judgement and may result in requirements being imposed. Where appropriate we will always make recommendations for improvement.
 24. In addition, inspectors will identify areas of outstanding practice and priorities for improvement. For all service users the expectation is that care and practice are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation.
 25. Meeting all the requirements does not of itself result in a judgement of good or outstanding, nor does failure to meet all the requirements in full necessarily result in a judgement of requires improvement or inadequate. In determining the overall judgement, inspectors consider:
 - the quality of the service
 - the way in which standards are met
 - the seriousness of any failure to comply with regulations and its potential impact on outcomes for service users.
 26. Inspectors use their professional judgement to assess the impact of any breach of the regulations, or failure to meet the national minimum standards or statutory guidance, against other aspects of the services provided. However, it is expected that in an agency judged to be outstanding there will be no breaches of the regulations, and in an agency judged to be good, if there are any breaches of the detail of the regulations, these will be infrequent, minor, have no impact on safeguarding or promoting children's welfare and can be immediately remedied (although they will still be referred to in the inspection report).
 27. Ofsted inspection frameworks operate on the basis that only good is good enough for children, young people, adults and families whether that is in respect of their care or education. When an adoption support agency is not yet good, we will judge it to require improvement and set out where we believe it

needs to improve. Those improvements will be aligned with the relevant regulations and standards.

Summary of the evaluation schedule criteria for inspections

28. The judgements for inspections are:

- overall effectiveness
- the experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users
- quality of service provision
- safeguarding children, young people, adults and families
- leadership and management.

Overall effectiveness

29. Inspectors consider the evidence and judgements from across the evaluation schedule before arriving at the overall effectiveness judgement. They take account of the context of the adoption support agency and whether it specialises in adoption support for particular groups.

Good

30. In a good adoption support agency:

- Positive outcomes for service users are evident, including where this means helping them to cope with unavoidable disappointments.
- The intended outcomes of individual pieces of work are clear and agreed with service users, and where possible with children and young people; the success of each piece of work is measured, recorded and understood.
- Service users' views are routinely monitored and analysed; their views inform service delivery, the development of staff, agency developments and strategic thinking.
- The lifelong implications of adoption are clearly understood by all who work for the agency and are reflected in practice; the agency has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and takes effective steps to improve.
- Effective and continuous learning improves professional practice and is sustained over time.
- The agency ensures that assessments of services users' needs are effective and involves children and young people where appropriate.
- Any breaches of regulations are infrequent, minor and immediately remedied.

Outstanding

31. In an outstanding adoption support agency:

- Adoption support is of the highest quality and is delivering a demonstratively positive impact on the lives of the people involved; for some families, the progress made significantly exceeds what would be a reasonable expectation of progress. Inspirational, confident, ambitious and influential leadership promotes and pursues a positive outcome for all service users – leaders are visible and effective; they innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services for all service users.
- Innovative practice takes place and is effectively measured.
- Leaders, managers and staff have ambition and inspire high-quality work that supports progress which significantly exceeds reasonable expectations and protects and promotes the welfare of all people using the service.
- The agency is constantly seeking new and effective ways to improve.
- Leaders and managers share good and effective practice about adoption support to enable improvement beyond the individual agency.
- Research informs practice and makes a significant difference to people using the service.
- There are examples of excellent practice that are worthy of wider dissemination.
- There are no breaches of regulations.

Requires improvement

32. In an adoption support agency that requires improvement:

- The agency is not yet delivering good services; however, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Inadequate

33. In an adoption support agency that is inadequate:

- There are widespread or serious failures, which result in service users not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted; this will be the case if any of the judgements are inadequate.

The experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users

Good

34. The experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users are likely to be good where the criteria below best describe the experience of children and young people, adults and families.
- People – irrespective of age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race or sexual orientation – receiving an adoption support service influence the delivery of the services. This leads to positive changes in their circumstances. They may not achieve their desired outcome but, if this is the case, they are very carefully supported to understand why. The adoption support provided overall meets their needs. It leaves people feeling positive about the service and that they have been helped and supported.
 - The intended objectives of individual pieces of work are clear and agreed with service users and, if possible, with children and young people. The outcomes of each piece of work are measured, recorded and understood.

Outstanding

35. The experience and progress of, and outcomes for, those using the service are likely to be judged outstanding if:
- It is evident that they are making progress that significantly exceeds reasonable expectations, in having their needs met and they report a very positive experience of the service provided. In addition, the characteristics of a good judgement must be met.

Requires improvement

36. The experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users is likely to require improvement if:
- The characteristics of good are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the needs of the people using the service not being met. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Inadequate

37. The experience and progress of, and outcomes for people using the service is likely to be inadequate if:
- There are widespread or serious failures that result in people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Quality of service provision

Good

38. The quality of service provision in an adoption support agency is likely to be judged good if the following characteristics best describe the service provided:
- There is a prompt, welcoming, professional, person-centred service that is accessible to all irrespective of age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race or sexual orientation.
 - The agency has an appropriate strategy and clear plans to achieve the desired outcomes for each service user. The agency works with the service user, and the local authority where involved, to ensure that support meets the demands of commissioners and is individually designed, enabling people using the service to progress at their own pace.
 - The manager, staff and volunteers are well trained, demonstrating an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of adoption issues relating to the services they provide. Their knowledge and training have a positive impact on relationships with service users and outcomes for them. They provide a prompt, professional and highly sensitive service that makes a difference to people's lives and results in people using the service developing an improved understanding of issues affecting them and an ability to deal with any difficulties that may arise.
 - Service users are helped to understand the possible effects of adoption on them and their family and, if appropriate, the potential outcomes of a search and/or a reunion with a member of their birth family.
 - The agency ensures that assessments of services users' needs are effective and involve children and young people where appropriate.

Outstanding

39. The quality of service in an adoption support agency is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement:
- There is evidence that professional practice exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained improvement to the lives of people receiving an adoption support service. Relevant research informs practice, some of which will be innovative, and makes a significant difference to people using

the service and there are examples of excellent practice that are worthy of wider dissemination.

Requires improvement

40. Quality of provision is likely to require improvement when:

- The characteristics of good are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Inadequate

41. The quality of service provision is likely to be inadequate if:

- There are widespread or serious failures that result in people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Safeguarding children, young people, adults and families

Good

42. Safeguarding is likely to be judged good if the following criteria best describe the agency's practice:

- The agency is able to demonstrate a deep and effective knowledge about child protection, the relative roles of the agency and local authorities, and the action to take where there are concerns or actual harm to a child or adult.
- There is evidence that the agency puts safeguarding at the centre of all its activities and ensures that all service users and their families are safe and benefit from effective safeguarding and child protection procedures.
- There is evidence of research-informed practice contributing to improved outcomes for services users.
- Professionals working with service users know and understand the indicators that may suggest a child or young person is suffering or is at risk of suffering harm and they take the appropriate and necessary action in accordance with local procedures and statutory guidance.
- Staff and volunteers receive regular supervision and support if they are working directly and regularly with children and young people where there

are concerns about their safety and welfare. Staff receive clinical and specialist supervision where needed, including where the agency is an individual provider.⁹

- There is evidence of high-quality training for staff and volunteers in respect of child protection procedures and the minimisation of risk to children. This includes actions in relation to children who are missing or at risk of sexual exploitation.
- Staff display high levels of expertise in, and awareness of, child protection. They demonstrate an understanding of the implications of historic abuse and neglect. They are supported by an open culture where leaders and managers constantly strive to improve safeguarding practice. Before services commence, service users are told of the agency's approach to child protection and historic abuse. Where relevant, adopters are helped to understand the impact of children's past experiences and this has a positive effect on their child's behaviour and/or on their parenting.
- Children, young people and adult service users know who they can talk to if they have concerns or complaints and have confidence that they will be taken seriously. The agency learns from complaints and feedback from children and adults and there is evidence that improvements are made in response.
- Children and young people are supported, protected and informed appropriately about the action the adult is taking to share their concerns. Parents are made aware of concerns and their consent is sought in accordance with local procedures, unless doing so would increase the risk of or actual harm to a child.
- Any child protection and/or safeguarding concerns are immediately shared with the local authority in the area where the concerned professional is working and a record of that referral is retained. There is evidence that the referral has been followed up quickly and that action has been taken to protect the child or young person from further harm.
- Written records are made and held securely where adults working with children are concerned about their safety or welfare. Those records are shared appropriately where necessary and with the necessary consent.
- Current or historic allegations or suspicions of harm are handled sensitively and in accordance with procedures, including, where appropriate, vulnerable adult procedures. All relevant agencies are involved, staff understand their roles and know what to do, and children and young people and adult service users know what to expect.
- The agency maintains contact with local authority child protection teams, adult safeguarding services, the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

⁹ Individuals who are registered providers of adoption support agencies where the registered provider is an individual (as opposed to a partnership or organisation) and they do not have staff or volunteers

and the local authority designated officer (LADO) or (equivalent role), as appropriate. This leads to easily accessible and effective liaison on any concerns about children and promotes a safe service. The agency's safeguarding policy is submitted to the LSCB and the LADO located in the area of the registered agency.

- Staff and volunteers working with children, young people and adults are carefully selected and vetted on a regular and ongoing basis, and there is monitoring to prevent unsuitable people from being recruited and having the opportunity to harm children, young people and adults or place them at risk.

Outstanding

43. Safeguarding is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement:

- Research-informed practice, some of which may be innovative, results in those who receive adoption support benefiting from highly effective safeguarding practice.
- Adopters demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of safeguarding issues and of the possible impact of abuse on children, young people and adults.
- Adults receiving support from the agency are helped to develop an understanding of how abuse may have affected them in their past and are being very effectively helped to cope with the impact.
- Evidence of up-to-date knowledge in the handling of disclosures of historic abuse leads to timely and effective practice.

Requires improvement

44. Safeguarding is likely to require improvement when:

- The characteristics of good are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service.

Inadequate

45. Safeguarding is likely to be inadequate if:

- There are widespread or serious failures that result in people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations that have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the adoption support service.

Leadership and management

Good

46. Leadership and management is likely to be judged good if the following characteristics best describe agency practice:
- Senior managers, leaders, individual providers and trustees show a strong commitment to adoption support and deliver an ambitious service to children and young people, adults affected by adoption, adopters and birth families. They develop, or are working to develop, highly effective working relationships with commissioners, partner organisations and with other adoption agencies. This improves the experience and progress of children, young people and adults who are receiving adoption support. Prompt and effective action is taken if children or young people are unhappy or unsafe. With the agreement of people using their service, agencies provide timely updates to commissioners about service users' progress.
 - Leaders and managers effectively monitor service delivery and conduct a thorough and insightful review of the agency at the frequency set out in the national minimum standards. This leads to an accurate understanding of the agency's strengths and weaknesses and effective actions that have improved services. The views of children and young people, birth parents, adopters and other stakeholders inform this review, as do complaints, which are welcomed as an opportunity to learn and develop. Leaders, managers and individual providers use the results of the review to drive continuous improvement in the services that are provided. The agency manages its resources effectively to meet the needs of the children, young people, adoptive families and adults affected by adoption. Their work promotes family stability and supports people to understand the effect of adoption on their lives.
 - The statement of purpose and children's guide are clear, accessible and comprehensive. This enables all service users and staff to be clear about the aims and objectives of the agency and the services available.
 - Staff, managers and individual providers are appropriately qualified and experienced. They have regular supervision and receive up-to-date, relevant training to enable them to work effectively with service users. Staff appraisals are held on time and take into account the views of service users, as appropriate. Appraisals clearly link to improved staff performance. Where appropriate, staff and individual providers working with children and families receive specialist supervision.
 - Records are clear, up to date and are stored securely. The agency has appropriate insurance cover and effective administrative systems are in place.
 - Regulatory notifications are made as required by regulations and the agency can demonstrate that appropriate follow-up action has been taken.

- There is evidence that effective action has been taken in relation to any requirements and recommendations made at the previous inspection.
- Effective and continuous learning improves professional practice and is sustained over time.
- Leaders and managers effectively monitor the financial stability of the business and take positive steps to address any anticipated shortfalls in income. There are financial accounts audited by an accountant confirming the agency's financial viability. The agency has appropriate insurance cover and efficient and robust administrative systems in place.

Outstanding

47. Leadership and management are likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement:
- There is evidence that leaders and managers are inspirational, confident, ambitious, innovative and influential in improving the lives of people who receive an adoption support service. The agency can demonstrate that it makes a significant difference to the lives and experience of people using the service.
 - Professional relationships between the agency, the local authority and other partner organisations are highly effective.
 - Leaders innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services for all service users. Leaders, managers and staff have high ambition and inspire high-quality work that leads, for some families, to progress that significantly exceeds expectations and protects and promotes the welfare of all service users. They know their strengths and weaknesses well and can provide evidence of significant improvement over a sustained period. Leaders and managers share good and effective practice about adoption support to enable improvement beyond the individual agency.

Requires improvement

48. Leadership and management are likely to require improvement when:
- The characteristics of good are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on people using the service.

Inadequate

49. Leadership and management are likely to be inadequate if:
- There are widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded and

promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

50. Judgements of inadequate in any judgement area will always limit the overall effectiveness judgement to inadequate.

The approach following a judgement of inadequate for overall effectiveness

51. A judgement of inadequate for overall effectiveness is made where there are failures to comply with requirements and as a result there are widespread or serious failures that result in people using the service being put at risk. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on outcomes.
52. Where an adoption support agency is judged inadequate, the inspector sets requirements against the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and relevant adoption regulations. The registered person must meet these requirements as set out in regulations. Inspectors may also make recommendations to help the registered person to improve the quality and standards of care. Recommendations should always relate to particular national minimum standards.
53. Our inspectors may also make recommendations to help the registered person to further improve the quality and standards of care. Recommendations always relate to the national minimum standards.
54. When making a judgement of inadequate for an adoption support agency, the inspector must always consult with a member of Ofsted's social care compliance team. The social care compliance inspector must instigate a case discussion where:
- there is evidence of any immediate risk of harm to service users, children and/or parents, breach of regulations that constitutes an offence, or breach of any conditions placed on the registration
 - the last inspection resulted in a judgement of inadequate for overall effectiveness.
55. The inspector should also consider consulting with the social care compliance team where there is any history of:
- complaints against the adoption support agency that have not been dealt with in a satisfactory way
 - failure to comply with regulations and/or national minimum standards that have not been dealt with in a satisfactory way
 - failure to take satisfactory action to meet requirements/actions and recommendations that call into question the suitability of the registered person.

56. The purpose of the case discussion is to consider whether any enforcement action should be taken. The 'Social care compliance handbook' contains detailed information about the criteria for instigating a case discussion, the enforcement options available, and the arrangements for following up enforcement activity.¹⁰
57. In all instances where an overall judgement of inadequate is given, the next inspection must take place within six to 12 months. It takes place sooner if any further significant concerns arise during this period or if an earlier inspection is necessary to meet statutory requirements.

Reporting findings at inspections

58. A report follows each inspection, which sets out the inspection findings using text and grades, organised under the headings in the table below. The adoption support agency should be working to ensure that no child, young person or adult is disadvantaged due to age, ability, disability, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or religious belief. How the agency promotes equality and tackles discrimination will be taken into account across all the judgement areas and will be reported on throughout the inspection report.

Report contents

Agency information	Brief contextual information about the agency
Overall effectiveness	Grade
Areas for improvement	No grade
Quality of service provision	Grade
The experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users	Grade
Leadership and management	Grade
About this inspection	Information about the legal basis for the inspection

59. Ofsted aims to send the draft inspection report to the registered provider for a factual accuracy check within 10 working days of the end of the inspection.
60. The registered provider or representatives should return the draft inspection report with any comments on factual accuracy within five working days. The final report is published on the Ofsted website within 20 working days of the end of the inspection (irrespective of appeals or complaints).

Inspection activity

61. Inspectors focus their inspection activities on evaluating the experience and progress for service users and how the quality and impact of the service help to promote positive experiences and progress.
62. In preparation for inspection, inspectors look at the information that Ofsted has about the service, which includes:
 - previous inspection reports
 - the statement of purpose and, where appropriate, the children's guide
 - concerns and complaints received
 - notifications of significant events received
 - any changes to registration, including a change of manager
 - any current or recent enforcement activity
 - any responses to questionnaires submitted by children, young people and adults using the service and stakeholders
 - any data, quality assurance assessment and reports under national minimum standard 25 submitted by the agency
 - knowledge and understanding gained from previous inspections.
63. Inspection activities include:
 - discussion with service users, including children and young people whenever possible
 - discussion with staff and managers
 - gathering views from partners and stakeholders, such as referring local authorities and commissioners
 - reading case files
 - examining records.
64. Four inspector days are allocated to each inspection, which includes preparation, fieldwork and report writing. The number of days may vary based on the range of adoption support services offered and size of the agency.
65. The inspection specifically focuses on gathering evidence against the evaluation schedule. The detail of activities undertaken and discussions held may vary depending on the services the adoption support agency provides and on lines of enquiry identified for each individual inspection.
66. The views of children, young people, adoptive families, adults and other agencies are sought through pre-inspection questionnaires. We will meet with a range of service users whenever possible and as appropriate.

User and partner views and surveys

67. Inspectors take account of the extent to which agencies have sought and acted on the views of service users and partner agencies in reviewing and improving services and the experience and progress of service users.
68. For each inspection, questionnaires are distributed to all service users and partner agencies. Electronic communication methods are used to reduce the impact of a shorter notice period and to improve accessibility. All questionnaires are available in a variety of communication formats.

Communication and feedback

69. Inspectors provide regular opportunities for dialogue and feedback during the inspection. Oral feedback about draft findings is given to the agency at the end of the inspection. Requirements and recommendations are clearly stated, as are any strengths and weaknesses in practice. Judgements are indicative at this stage and may change following quality assurance checks.

Confidentiality

70. Ofsted takes appropriate steps to ensure that personal information provided to inspectors remains confidential, as required by statute. However, evidence gathered during inspections may be subject to disclosure under the 'Freedom of Information Act 2000', although the identity of named individuals is not disclosed. Where Ofsted considers that any information provided indicates the likelihood of harm, we pass the necessary information to the local authority children's services for action.

Quality assurance

71. All Ofsted inspection reports are subject to quality assurance procedures.
72. The inspector is responsible for ensuring that all evidence gathered is robust, reliable and secure.
73. Ofsted asks the manager of the adoption support agency to complete a short evaluation form following each inspection, which is used to improve the quality of inspections.
74. Ofsted's quality assurance processes include reviews of:
 - inspection reports
 - the evidence base underpinning inspection judgements
 - inspection fieldwork through a programme of accompanied visits.

The person assuring reports for quality will discuss any proposed change of judgement from the provisional judgement given at verbal feedback during the inspection, with the appropriate Regulatory Inspection Manager. Any decision to change an overall judgement of inadequate must be referred to the Regional Senior HMI and Regional Director for a decision. The Regional Senior HMI and Regional Director will also make the final decision about a proposal to downgrade any overall judgement to inadequate. On these rare occasions, the inspector must inform the provider of the revised judgements and provide reasons for the changes before the provider receives the draft report.

Conduct during the inspection

75. Inspectors must uphold the highest professional standards in their work, and ensure that everyone they encounter during inspections is treated fairly and with respect. The code of conduct requires inspectors to:
- evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour
 - evaluate provision in line with frameworks, national standards or requirements
 - base all evaluations on clear and robust evidence
 - have no connection with the provider which could undermine their objectivity
 - report honestly and clearly, ensuring that judgements are fair and reliable
 - carry out their work with integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy, respect and sensitivity
 - endeavour to minimise the stress on those involved in the inspection
 - act in the best interests and well-being of service users
 - maintain purposeful and productive dialogue with those being inspected, and communicate judgements clearly and frankly
 - respect the confidentiality of information, particularly about individuals and their work
 - respond appropriately to reasonable requests
 - take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues.

Expectations of providers

76. In order that inspection and regulation are productive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a professional working environment based on courtesy and professional behaviour. Inspectors are expected to uphold Ofsted's code of conduct but we also expect providers to:

- be courteous and professional
- apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with inspectors
- enable inspectors to conduct their visit in an open and honest way
- enable inspectors to evaluate the provision objectively against the standards/framework
- provide evidence that enables the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision
- work with inspectors to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
- ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on their premises
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the inspector or the inspection team
- draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors promptly and in a suitable manner
- respect that inspectors need to observe practice and talk to staff and users without the presence of a manager or registered person.

Complaints

77. The great majority of Ofsted's work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns arise during an inspection, these should be raised with the inspector as soon as possible during the inspection visit. This provides an opportunity to resolve the matter before the inspection is completed. Any concerns about the factual accuracy of the findings in the report can be raised after the inspection and will be considered as part of the quality assurance process.
78. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a formal complaint can be raised under Ofsted's complaints procedure:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted.

Further information

79. We hope that you find this document useful in helping you to prepare for your inspection. If you have any queries about your inspection, please discuss them with your lead inspector when they contact you.
80. If you have any other general queries about the inspections of adoption support agencies, please contact socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk.