

Inspections of children's centres

Consultation document

Ofsted has been asked to inspect all children's centres. This consultation document seeks the views of everyone with an interest in children's centres on our proposals for inspecting children's centres.

The closing date for the consultation is 18 September 2009.

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Age group: 0–5 years

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Purpose and scope of the consultation

1. Children's centres provide a range of services for children and their families. They have been set up in stages from 2004, starting with the most disadvantaged communities. The Government's target is to have a children's centre in every community by April 2010.
2. Children's centres that have been set up by local authorities using government funding provide a range of services for children under five and their families. Children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas provide early learning and childcare, family support, health services, support into employment and links to other specialist services. The Government sees children's centres as an essential way of improving outcomes for young children, and for closing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and others. Outcomes for children are taken from the Government's Every Child Matters guidance: children staying safe; being healthy; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and having economic well-being.
3. The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families has asked Ofsted to inspect and report on the effectiveness of each children's centre. A new bill passing through Parliament – the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Bill – will give Ofsted the legal duty to do this.
4. In response to these proposed new duties for Ofsted, we are developing a framework for inspecting children's centres. This framework will describe how the general principles and processes of inspection will be applied to children's centres in England. We are testing the framework through a national programme of pilot inspections in a variety of centres during 2009. We will use the information gathered from these pilot inspections and from this consultation to develop the inspection framework. We anticipate that a full programme of children's centre inspections will begin in 2010. The Department for Children, Schools and Families will decide how often we inspect each children's centre.
5. As part of our development work for the inspection of children's centres, we are seeking the views of other organisations and agencies who either provide services offered by children's centres or who are involved in inspecting them. This includes national childcare organisations, the Care Quality Commission, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the Children's Healthcare Promotion Programme, the Department for Work and Pensions and primary care trusts.
6. This consultation document outlines our proposals for inspecting children's centres. We seek the views of all those with an interest in children's centres.
7. Children's centres and local authorities that took part in the pilot inspections will be invited to give feedback through written responses to a questionnaire and to contribute to a conference to be held following pilot inspections in June 2009. We will consult other organisations and parents through a number of other events, including focus groups.

8. 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.

How children's centres are currently inspected

9. Currently, Ofsted has no legal power to inspect or report on the effectiveness of children's centre services as a whole. However, we do have duties to inspect some of the services that children's centres provide.
10. Under the Childcare Act 2006¹ and the Education Act 2005², we must inspect, and report on, the education and childcare³ provided by children's centres. This means that all children's centres opened before April 2007 and located in the most disadvantaged areas currently fall within Ofsted's legal remit for inspection as they must provide early education and childcare. Some centres that opened later than April 2007 do not directly provide the full range of services and may not fall within Ofsted's current remit.
11. We also inspect providers of government-funded work-based learning and/or adult and community learning. This may involve an inspection visit to a children's centre to evaluate the quality and impact of any work-based or adult and community learning which is provided on site.

Proposals for inspecting children's centres

12. We propose that the inspection will focus on an evaluation of the effectiveness of a children's centre's services in improving outcomes for those served by the centre⁴ – children, their families and the local community. This will involve:
 - an evaluation of the services provided by a centre
 - whether these are matched to local need
 - how well they are integrated and managed
 - the success of any outreach services and training for adults.

The evaluation will be based on the evidence a centre provides of its impact on improving outcomes and narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and others.

¹ The Childcare Act 2006, sets out how early years provision must be registered. It introduced the Early Years Foundation Stage as a statutory framework for the learning, development and welfare of children, from birth to the 31 August following their fifth birthday, in early years settings and maintained and independent schools; www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_1

² www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_1

³ Early years provision is all provision for children from birth until 31 August following their fifth birthday, made by schools and early years settings, that requires inspection.

⁴ Referred to in this document as 'users'.

13. Our starting point is *Ofsted inspects: A framework for all Ofsted inspection and regulation*,⁵ which sets out the principles and codes of conduct that underpin all Ofsted's inspection and regulation activities.
14. We are proposing little or no notice for inspections for children's centres. During the inspection, inspectors will need to look at a range of the services provided by a centre; talk to centre staff, including any involved in outreach services; meet representatives of the local authority who have responsibility for the children's centre; and find out the views of children, parents and other users of the centre. It would be difficult to make sure that everyone's views are heard if a centre is given no notice of an inspection. During the pilot programme we will be testing how little notice we can give.
15. We have developed a series of questions that inspectors need to ask in order to judge the effectiveness of the services provided by a children's centre. The questions are:
 - How good are outcomes for those served by the centre?⁶
 - How good is the provision?
 - How effective are the leadership and management of the centre?
 - What is the centre's capacity for sustained improvement?
 - How effective overall is the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for those served by the centre?
 - What does the centre need to do to improve further?
16. These questions will lead on to more detailed questions about the effectiveness of the centre's services. For example, a consideration of *How effective are the leadership and management of the centre?* will include an evaluation of how well:
 - the governance, accountability and management arrangements of the centre are understood
 - resources are used and managed
 - equality and diversity are actively promoted
 - children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults are kept safe
 - evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities
 - improvement is driven by an ambitious vision and clear targets
 - partnerships with other agencies ensure that different services are provided in one place

⁵ www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080121

⁶ 'Outcomes' refers to the five Every Child Matters outcomes set out in paragraph 2.

- the centre supports and encourages the local community to use its services, and how well it uses their views to develop its provision.
17. We will grade inspections using the four-point scale which is common to all Ofsted inspections:
- outstanding
 - good
 - satisfactory
 - inadequate.

We will describe what each grade means 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 outstanding or good, what constitutes satisfactory and what is inadequate. We will decide what information each grade should contain.

18. The pilot inspections are being carried out between June and December 2009. During the pilots, we shall also be testing how long it takes to complete an inspection of a children's centre. At the moment, we anticipate that a team of two or three inspectors need spend no longer than two days in the centre. However, the exact number of inspectors and the length of time spent on site will depend on the size and complexity of the centre.
19. We must make sure that inspectors see enough of the centre's work to reach clear judgements. We will ask the centre or local authority to tell us what it considers to be the centre's main site. Inspectors will spend most of their time there. They will visit other sites if other, important services are provided there.
20. After each inspection, the inspectors will produce a report which will be published on Ofsted's website. The report will comment on the elements listed in paragraph 15. It will include recommendations setting out what actions the local authority and/or the centre need to take to improve.

Aspects for consultation

A framework for all children's centres

21. We recognise that children's centres vary a great deal. We intend to develop one inspection framework that will be flexible enough to use for all children's centres, no matter how they are organised or the services they provide. Having one inspection framework will enable local authorities and the Government to make comparisons between centres more easily.
22. We believe that the questions set out in paragraph 15 are central to the inspection of any children's centre and that these are well matched to the needs of the centre and its users. It is for the centre to demonstrate to the inspectors how well it knows its community; how well it has identified which

services are needed; and how well the services meet local needs and improve outcomes for its users.

Consultation questions

- Q1. Do you agree that it is appropriate to use one inspection framework for all children's centres regardless of how they are organised or what they offer?*
- Q2. Do you agree that the following key questions in the framework are sufficient to allow inspectors to capture the work of every children's centre?*
- How good are outcomes for those served by the centre?⁷
 - How good is the provision?
 - How effective are the leadership and management of the centre?
 - What is the centre's capacity for sustained improvement?
 - How effective overall is the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for those served by the centre?
 - What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Local authority involvement

23. Local authorities play a key role in the provision of children's centres and making sure that provision is sufficient to meet local need. The Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Bill will give local authorities a duty to produce a written statement in response to the inspection report, including the actions they will take and by when.
24. We believe it is important for local authorities to be able to be involved with the inspections of the children's centres in their area. To minimise bureaucracy and repetition, we propose that inspectors should have an annual discussion with the person responsible for all children's centres in a local authority, or local authority area. Alternatively, this person could make one written submission. They would be able to contribute to individual self-evaluations or inspections of children's centres if they wished to do so.

⁷ 'Outcomes' refers to the five outcomes set out in paragraph 2.

- Q3. Do you agree that local authorities should contribute evidence to the inspections of children's centres?*
- Q4. Do you agree that a single annual update, through discussion or written statement, would allow the local authority to contribute evidence on developments to the way they deliver children's centres without causing undue time pressures?*
- Q5. If you think an annual update is a good idea, would you prefer this to be an annual discussion or a written statement?*

One self-evaluation form

25. Self-evaluation has become an important part of the inspection process. At the moment, children's centres have the option to complete more than one self-evaluation form (SEF). There is the annual self-evaluation for the children's centre's meeting with the local authority, which centres must complete. There are also two Ofsted SEFs – one for schools and one for registered childcare providers – which the centre can choose to complete. We recognise that having two Ofsted SEFs is confusing and could lead to duplication of effort.
26. It is not possible in the short term to merge the different SEFs into one document. Therefore, we are asking the children's centres identified for pilot inspections to provide us with a copy of the local authority SEF to prevent further duplication. Children's centres taking part in the pilots have indicated that they would prefer the local authority SEF to follow the format of the key questions asked at inspection set out in paragraph 15.
27. We have started a discussion with colleagues at the Department for Children, Schools and Families about how we can achieve one SEF covering all the centre's services. We propose that this SEF would encourage centres to evaluate their services against the key questions listed in paragraph 15. The centre's view of itself would be tested by the inspection. The SEF would be available to Ofsted and local authorities.
28. Where a maintained school includes a children's centre which it directly manages on a day-to-day basis, we are proposing that the school SEF includes the centre SEF as a new section in the one document.
- Q6. Do you agree that children's centres should be asked to complete one self-evaluation form (SEF), even where this is for different recipients?*
- Q7. For a school which includes a children's centre, do you agree that we should include an additional section to record the evaluation of the centre's services within the school SEF?*

Integrating inspections

29. We are required to inspect all registered early years provision within a prescribed period, with the current cycle ending in July 2012. The new school

inspection framework starting in September 2009 also defines the period for inspecting schools.

30. Whenever we can, we aim to reduce bureaucracy by inspecting and reporting on the effectiveness of the centre's services at the same time as the early years provision or the school is inspected.
31. This might not be possible in all cases, for example where the early years provision has already been inspected, or where either this provision or the school as a whole has been judged as inadequate. Where it is not possible to integrate inspections, inspectors will take account of the outcomes of any recent⁸ inspections of schools, early years provision, and/or any adult and community learning when judging the effectiveness of the centre's services.

Q8. Do you agree that inspections of children's centre services should be integrated, whenever possible, with inspections of other provision?

Any other comments?

Q9. Is there anything further you would like to say about our proposed approach to inspecting children's centres?

⁸ During the pilot phase, 'recent' is being interpreted as any time in the year prior to the inspection of the centre.

Annex A. Stakeholders consulted

The organisations listed below have been specifically invited to respond and receive this consultation questionnaire via email:

4Children

Association of Colleges

Association of Directors of Children's Services

Care Quality Commission

Chief executives of primary care trusts

Daycare Trust

Department for Work and Pensions

Early Years lead officers/children's centre designated lead officers in all 152 local authorities in England

Learning Skills Council

Members of Ofsted's National Consultative Forum

National Childminding Association

National Day Nurseries Association

National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE)

Pre-school Learning Alliance

Annex B. The consultation

Consultation questions

We welcome your responses to this consultation paper. The consultation remains open until 18 September 2009.

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

- online electronic questionnaire
- print and post
- download and email.

Online electronic questionnaire

Visit our website to complete and submit an electronic version of the questionnaire: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090102.

Print and post

Our website includes a Word version of the questionnaire that can be printed and filled in by hand. Download the file from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090102. When you have completed the questionnaire, please post it to:

Inspection of children's centres consultation
c/o Children's Directorate (Inspection Development)
National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Download and email

Our website includes a Word version of the questionnaire that can be downloaded and filled in on your computer. Download the file from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090102. When you have completed the questionnaire, please email it to: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. Please put 'Inspections of children's centres consultation' in the subject line.

What happens next?

Who will be involved in developing the proposals and how?

We will publish a summary of the key responses in December 2009.

The consultation response

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.
Please complete the 'Additional questions about you' section at the end if you wish as it provides us with useful information

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:

I represent:

A children's centre

A local authority

A school

An Early Years lead officer

A primary care trust

A children's services directorate

Another type of organisation

(please specify)

Section 2

If you are completing the consultation as an individual, please tell us which description is most applicable to you.

I am:

A parent or carer

A teacher

A children's centre worker

Other (please specify)

Prefer not to say

For each of the following questions, please select the option which most closely fits your view

Q1. Do you agree that it is appropriate to use one inspection framework for all children’s centres regardless of how they are organised or what they offer?

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. Do you agree that the following key questions in the framework are sufficient to allow inspectors to capture the work of every children’s centre?

- How good are outcomes for those served by the centre?⁹
- How good is the provision?
- How effective are the leadership and management of the centre?
- What is the centre’s capacity for sustained improvement?
- How effective overall is the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for those served by the centre?
- What does the centre need to do to improve further?

⁹ ‘Outcomes’ refers to the five outcomes set out in paragraph 2.

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. Do you agree that local authorities should contribute evidence to the inspections of children's 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

Q4. Do you agree that a single annual update, through discussion or written statement, would allow the local authority to contribute evidence on developments to the way they deliver children's centres without causing undue time pressures?

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

Q5. If you think an annual update is a good idea, would you prefer this to be an annual discussion or a written statement?

Discussion	Written statement	Other means (please state)	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q6. Do you agree that children’s centres should be asked to complete one self-evaluation form, even where this is for different recipients?

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. For a school which includes a children’s centre, do you agree that we should include an additional section to record the evaluation of the centre’s services within the school self-evaluation form?

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

Q8. Do you agree that inspections of children’s centre services should be integrated, whenever possible, with inspections of other provision?

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

Q9. Is there anything further you would like to say about our proposed approach to inspecting children's centres?

Comments

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 process by ticking the box for that which most closely represents how you feel about each of the statements below.

I found the consultation information accessible and easy to find.

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Don't know

I had enough information about the consultation topic.

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Don't know

I would take part in a future Ofsted consultation.

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Don't know

How did you hear about this consultation?

- Ofsted website
- *Ofsted News*
- *talisman*
- Ofsted conference
- Another organisation (please specify below, if known)
- Other (please specify below)

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 anonymous and you do not have to answer every question.**

Please tick the appropriate box.

1. Gender

Female <input type="checkbox"/>	Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Transgender <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"/>
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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