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Guidance

Social care common inspection framework (SCIF): adoption support agencies

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Introduction

This social care common inspection framework (SCIF) applies to inspections of:

- children's homes
- secure children's homes
- independent fostering agencies
- boarding schools and residential special schools
- voluntary adoption agencies
- adoption support agencies
- residential family centres
- residential holiday schools for disabled children
- residential provision in further education colleges

The SCCIF means that:

- we apply the same judgement structure across the range of settings listed above
- the expectations and progress of children and other service users, wherever they live, are at the centre of our inspections
- we focus on areas of evidence that we usually expect or at each inspection

The SCCIF is not a 'one-size-fits-all' framework. When it is necessary, the SCCIF reflects and addresses the unique and distinct aspects of each type of setting. However, the evaluation criteria are our to make judgements and the accompanying guidance are, wherever possible, consistent across settings.

The inspection principles

Ofsted's overview strategy outlines how we will carry out inspection and regulation activity. We:

- investigate
- responsible
- focused

Our approach is further underpinned by the following 3 principles that apply to all social care inspections.

To focus on the things that matter most to children's lives

We have reached a general consensus with the main social care stakeholders that social care services should be focused on the experiences and progress of children and other service users, and the adults who look after them, which matters most about children's experiences and progress.

Using this to guide us, we focus the criteria for our judgements on the difference that providers are making to children's lives. Adults can only support children well if they're well supported themselves. Therefore, we also look at the extent to which the quality of the support that the adults who care for children receive.

To be consistent in our expectations of providers

It is important for professionals and members of the public to compare services that are similar. We want to be fair to providers by being consistent in our expectations of providers. We use the same judgement structure and the same evaluation criteria, wherever possible, irrespective of where children live or receive help.

Our inspection methods are published guidance only either where there is a good reason to deviate from a similar national approach to deciding on the frequency of inspection.

To prioritise our work where improvement is needed most

We are committed to inspection in a way that focuses our resources where they are needed most. If leaders and managers have shown that they can consistently deliver good or outstanding provision, we may decide to reform our offer so that we can commission inspection.

However, we always take into account the risk to children of not inspecting or inspecting at a broad range of information to help us whether inspection is necessary. We also use our powers to refer to guide good and outstanding providers more quickly if we have concerns.

The focus of inspections

The SCCIF has a consistent and clear focus on evaluating the impact of care and support on the experiences and progress of children, largely through carefully timing and sampling. This means that:

- we focus on evaluating the looking at policies and procedures and more time looking at the impact of services on children's lives
- we give the minimum notice of inspection, so that we can see settings as they are on a typical day, and so that we can see how children are being cared for and supported. We judge it much as possible, we will be reviewing whether it is better for a longer period for settings that still have relatively lengthy notice arrangements
- we focus our inspection on what matters most to children, the information required by regulation is based there inspections. We will expect providers to produce their best evidence wherever we give notice of inspection

How inspectors make judgements under the SCCIF

Judgement structure

Our judgement structure clearly from our first principle of inspection – to focus on the things that matter most to children's lives. We focus our judgements on the experiences of children and other people who use children's services at the core of inspection.

All SCCCIF inspections follow the 4-point scale (outstanding, good, requires improvement to be good and inadequate) to make judgements on the overall experiences and progress of children, taking into account:

- how well children are helped and protected
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers

The judgement structure applies to all children's services, voluntary adoption agencies and residential fostering agencies (see below), as appropriate, the overall experiences and progress of children.

Inspectors will also make the following judgements, in addition to the overall judgement. This means that if inspectors judge this area to be inadequate, then the 'overall experiences and progress' judgement will always be inadequate.

The judgement of the effectiveness of leaders and managers is a special judgement. If inspectors judge this area to be inadequate, this is likely to lead to a judgement of 'requires improvement to be good' rather than inspection improvement to be good. 'Overall experiences and progress'.

Inspectors will make the limiting and graded judgements first so that they can take these into account for the 'overall progress and experiences' judgement.

How inspectors use the evaluation criteria

Ofsted's tools use the descriptors of what 'good' looks like as the benchmarks against which to judge the quality of the provision. We use the evaluation criteria. A not-factual checklist. It is a professional evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the care and support provided to children and other service users. We use the evaluation criteria for good and will not automatically lead to a judgement of 'requires improvement to be good.

Some criteria will have less relevance than others in some settings because of the nature of the setting and needs of the children.

Even when all the criteria are relevant, there is always a degree of professional judgement in weighing and balancing evidence against the evaluation criteria.

Inspectors will use the criteria to ensure that they are fair and that they are not discriminatory with this thinking. We can also the 'must for'.

The evaluation criteria for SCCIF inspections are broadly consistent across different types of setting but, where necessary, they have been adapted to reflect the varying and unique nature of each type of provision.

Required evidence

Inspectors look at several areas of required evidence for each judgement. Some areas of evidence are the same for all settings, and others are specific to the type of provision. The areas of required evidence are set out in the bullet points at the beginning of the evaluation criteria for each judgement.

Evaluation criteria

Inspectors use the following criteria to make judgements, including benchmarks of what good looks like:

The overall experiences and progress of children and adults

Areas of required evidence are:

- the quality of individualised support provided and the influence and impact of the provider on the progress and experiences of children and adult service users
- the quality of relationships between professionals and children, adult service users and their families and carers
- how well the views of children and adult service users are understood and taken into account

Good

The experiences and progress of children and adult users and likely to be judged good if there is evidence of the following:

Children and adult service users are enabled to build trusted and secure relationships with staff. Children and adult service users view the help they receive positively.

Children and adults, including those who communicate non-verbally, are supported to actively participate in day-to-day and more complex decisions about their care and lives. They are listened to and their views are taken into account where it may not be possible to act on their wishes and why other action is taken that is in their best interests.

Children and adult service users know how to complain. The agency's complaints policy is easy to understand, accessible and focused on the needs of children and adult service users and their families and carers. Children are supported. Their complaints are treated seriously and are responded to clearly. Urgent action is taken and practice and/or service improve accordingly.

Any specific type or model of support delivered or commissioned by the agency is provided by staff who are suitably trained, experienced, qualified and supervised. The benefits of this to children and adult service users are clearly evident. The support is reviewed regularly.

Children and adult service users develop skills and strategies to manage their relationships and difficult feelings through developing positive relationships with staff.

Adoption support, including intermediaries and birth records counselling and mediation services, is provided to children and their families and birth parents in ways 'individual circumstances and meets their needs. It is well organised and accessible and has a positive impact on their lives. Work promotes family stability and children's emotional well-being and helps them to maintain family bias and their family and. If appropriate, the potential outcomes of a search or a reunion with a member of their family.

Assessments are effective and the intended objectives of individual pieces of adoption support are clear and agreed with service users and. If possible, children. The outcomes of each piece of work are evaluated, recorded and referenced.

Requires improvement to be good

The experiences and progress of children and adult services and likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if there is evidence of the following:

The agency is not yet delivering good support for children and adult service users. The weaknesses identified need to be addressed to fully support children and adult service users and their families and carers. Although the agency is not doing harm, however, there are no serious or widespread failures that would result in children and adults. Welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate

The experiences and progress of children and adult services and likely to be judged inadequate if there is evidence of the following:

There are serious or widespread failures that mean children and adults are not protected, or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, or their support and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

Outstanding

The experiences and progress of children and adult services and likely to be judged outstanding if evidence is meeting the requirements of a good judgement. There is evidence of the following:

Professional practice consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children and adult service users even when they have complex and challenging needs. There is evidence of sustained improvement for children and adults because of the support provided by the agency. Staff are able to evidence the sustained benefit they have had in children and adult service users' lives and how this has been of benefit to their needs. There are examples of sustained practice that are worthy of wider dissemination.

Research-informed practice, some of which may be innovative, continues to develop from a strong and confident base, making an exceptional difference to the lives and experiences of children and adult service users.

How well children and adults are helped and protected

Areas of required evidence are:

- how well risks are identified, understood and managed and whether the support provided helps children and adults to become increasingly safe, where this is the intended outcome
- how well carers are prepared and supported to respond to children who may go missing or may be at risk of exploitation or harm exploitation, radicalisation, sexual exploitation and trafficking
- how well carers are prepared and supported to manage situations and behaviour and whether crisis and concerned incidents contribute to a fostering or adoption breakdown or placement
- how well fostering arrangements to protect children meet all statutory and other government requirements, promote their welfare and prevent radicalisation and extremism

Good

The help and protection offered to children and adults and likely to be judged good if there is evidence of the following:

Children and adults receiving support feel protected and are protected from harm. There is a strong and effective response from all those involved with children and adults that reduces the actual harm or the risk of harm to them, including the most vulnerable. There is strong and effective support and effective contact and planning with the child's allocated social worker and their family.

Children and adults who use the service report that staff listen to them, take their concerns seriously and respond appropriately.

Careful recruitment and regular monitoring of staff prevent unsuitable people from being recruited and from having the opportunity to harm children. It is place time of risk. The recruitment and training of staff keep a strong focus on keeping children and adults safe. The relevant authorities are informed of any concerns.

Staff know and follow procedures for responding to concerns about the safety of a child or adult. Where appropriate, child or adult protection concerns are immediately shared with the commissioning and/or host local authority and a record of their referral is retained.

There is evidence that staff follow up the outcome of the referral quickly and effectively. Staff know how to make a referral to children's social care or the further future. Where the agency is not satisfied with the response from either children's social care or the local authority designated officer, it escalates its concerns appropriately, including by writing to the director of children's services (DCS) or the relevant local authority.

Requires improvement to be good

The help and protection offered to children and adult service users are likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if there is evidence of the following:

Children and adults are not yet receiving good help and protection, but there are no serious failures to leave them harmed or at risk of harm.

Inadequate

The help and protection offered to children and adults are likely to be inadequate if there is evidence of the following:

There are serious or widespread failures that leave children and adults being harmed, or risk of harm or with their welfare not safeguarded.

Outstanding

The help and protection offered to children and adults is likely to be judged outstanding if it satisfies the requirements of a good judgement. there is evidence of the following:

Professional practice results in sustained improvement to the lives of children and adults.

Proactive and creative safeguarding practice means that all children and adults, including the most vulnerable, have a strong sense of safety and well-being as a result of the support received.

Research-informed practice, some of which may be innovative, continues to develop from a strong and confident base, making an exceptional difference to the lives and experiences of children and adults receiving support.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Areas of required evidence are:

- whether leaders and managers show an ambitious vision, have high expectations for what all children can achieve and ensure high standards of adoption support
- how well leaders and managers ensure that the provision meets the needs of children and adults make progress from their starting points as a result of the adoption support they receive
- how well leaders and managers provide the right supportive environment for staff through effective supervision and training and implement development plans and training programmes, tailored to the needs of the children and adults receiving support
- how well leaders and managers ensure that the provision is well managed and governed, is responsive to children's needs, identify weaknesses and deficiencies and take effective action
- how well the provision is achieving its stated aims and objectives
- the extent to which leaders and managers promote equality and tackle discrimination, equality and diversity

If an adoption support agency is an individual, the agency's leaders and managers are the relevant parts of these grade descriptors. In most instances 'leaders and managers' or 'staff' can be replaced with the 'registered person'.

Good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers is likely to be judged good if there is evidence of the following:

The agency is managed effectively and efficiently by a permanent, suitably qualified and experienced manager who is ambitious for children and adult service users and has a clear vision for adoption support and the registered manager post.

Leaders and managers have a clear vision to provide the right supportive environment for staff through effective supervision and training and implement development plans and training programmes, tailored to the needs of the children and adults receiving support.

Robust action is taken to address all issues of concern identified in inspection or monitoring activity. Leaders and managers know what is working well and what needs to be carried out. Effective action has been taken to address all requirements and recommendations from previous inspections.

Leaders and managers take steps to ensure that plans for those receiving support are implemented and reviewed regularly. Leaders and managers are proactively and positively with commissioners and partner organisations. Leaders and managers seek to build effective working relationships with social care and other commissioning authorities to secure positive outcomes for children and adults.

Leaders and managers understand the plans for the children and other service users they support and ensure that the provision meets children, young and, where appropriate, permanence for children's futures.

Leaders and managers monitor the progress that services users make and can demonstrate the positive impact that adoption support has had on their progress and life chances.

Managers and staff receive regular and effective supervision that is focused on children and other service users' experiences, needs, plans and outcomes. Supervision is recorded effectively.

Leaders and managers are open to challenge and challenge, including through

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leaders and management meetings, to ensure that the professional development of staff is supported and that staff have a clear understanding of their roles. The emotional impact on staff of the work is recognised and managed by leaders and managers.

Training, development and induction activities are effective and focused on ensuring that staff know how to meet children's learning needs. Leaders are ambitious for staff and have high levels of effective training, support and coaching of staff so as to deliver anti-poverty practice in their specialist area.

Staff work collaboratively to provide consistency and stability. There are clear systems for communication between staff and managers. Staff are confident about their jobs. Staff report that they are well led and managed and there is other evidence to support this.

Leaders and managers' decisions about the help provided prioritise the safety and stability of the lives of children and other service users.

The statement of purpose and children's guide, which are kept under review, clearly set out the aims and objectives of the agency.

The registered provider is financially viable and can deliver high quality, stable adoption support to children and other service users.

Case records reflect the work that is carried out and clearly relate to the assessed needs of children and other service users. Case records effectively increase the understanding that children and adults have about their histories, background and experiences. The records are available to children and service users, who are able to see or contribute to them as they wish, with appropriate support.

All significant events that relate to the welfare and protection of children and vulnerable adults are notified by the registered person to the appropriate authorities. Necessary action is taken following the incident to ensure that the service user's needs are met and that the service user is safe and protected.

The culture of the agency is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all service users. The ethos and objectives of the agency are demonstrated in practice.

Require improvement to be good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers is likely to be judged require improvement to be good if there is evidence of the following:

The characteristics of good leadership and management are not in place. Where there are weaknesses in practice, leaders and managers have identified the issues. They have plans in place to address them or they are less serious and there is capacity to take the necessary action.

Inadequate
The effectiveness of leaders and managers will be judged inadequate if there is evidence of the following:

The experiences, progress or protection of children are inadequate, and leaders and managers do not know the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They have been ineffective in prioritising, challenging and making improvements.

The agency fails to work effectively in partnership with others in the best interests of children and adults.

Outstanding
The effectiveness of leaders and managers is likely to be judged outstanding if it identifies exceeding the requirements of a good judgement, there is evidence of the following:

Leaders and managers are inspirational, confident and ambitious for children and adult service users.

Leaders and managers create a culture of high aspiration and expectation and have high expectations of their staff.

Leaders and managers lead by example and innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest quality care for children and adult service users.

Leaders and managers know their strengths and weaknesses well and can provide evidence of improvement over a sustained period.

Leaders and managers develop and maintain professional relationships between the agency and partner agencies to ensure the best possible care, experiences and futures for children and adults.

Legal context

Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Ofsted carries out its work in ways that have regard to the Inspection Principles and regulations by:

- improve
- be cost-focused
- be efficient and effective in the use of resources

Section 50(4) of the Care Standards Act 2000 provides that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills may inspect any other premises and other establishments and agencies to which Part 2 of that Act applies.

The Care Standards Act sets out Ofsted's powers to regulate, inspect and enforce compliance with the statutory requirements and relevant regulations. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 defines an adoption support agency (section 8).

When inspecting adoption support agencies, Ofsted considers the knowledge and understanding gained from previous inspections, and the:

- Ofsted's inspection framework
- Ofsted's work in Children in Care
- relevant regulations and adoption national minimum standards
- adoption statutory guidance

How inspectors use national minimum standards

Adoption support agencies must meet the requirements of the regulations. If they do not, inspectors identify (and in what agencies must do by setting requirements or recommendations for improvement.

The Department for Education (DfE) has published national minimum standards (NMS). Providers do not meet the NMS, if they include a failure to meet the regulations.

Inspectors consider:

- the impact on children and other service users
- how it should influence the inspection judgement, which may result in requirements being imposed and/or enforcement action being taken

A failure to meet a regulation does not automatically lead to a judgement of requires improvement to be good.

Requirements may only be made when providers are judged to be good.

We use recommendations to indicate where practice can improve. These are always related to the relevant NMS and regulations.

Notice of inspection

Adoption support agencies are usually notified of an inspection 10 working days before the inspection. If the adoption support agency is a single individual, they are notified 5 working days before the inspection.

We email the initial contact to the agency. The lead inspector follows this up with a telephone call to the agency. The lead inspector sets out practical arrangements for the inspection during the initial telephone call. The lead inspector may also use telephone calls (and other calls) between the agency and inspectors that may be necessary during the period of initial provision, the opportunity to discuss further the work of the agency, and to discuss inspection arrangements.

We ask an agency to give the inspector access to premises, records and staff for the inspection to work. Inspectors may need some time to sample the system if records are not ready for the inspection. If the agency does not provide the information we have asked, although the inspector may ask for specific reports or documents to be printed.

Request for information at an inspection

When notification of an inspection is given, inspectors send by email to the provider:

- the adoption support agencies inspection pre-inspection information form
- the adoption support agencies inspection case sample form

The inspector agrees with the agency when the completed forms will be available. This information is requested using section 8 of the Care Standards Act 2000. It assists the inspection process and informs the inspection findings. It may generate additional inspection activity.

Providers can download a copy of the forms and complete them before the start of their inspection. They can send these to the inspector electronically during the inspection. The inspector may also request that the provider's CCTV footage be made available, although the inspector may ask for specific reports or documents to be printed.

Scheduling and the inspection team

Frequency of inspection

We inspect adoption support agencies at least once in each 3-year inspection cycle as set out in the Ofsted's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills Plan and Frequency of Inspection | Children's Homes etc. | Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/541).

We operate a rolling 3-year programme of inspection for each adoption support agency. We may vary the timing of inspection within the 3-year inspection cycle, but we will inform each 3-year window, each agency will usually be inspected for the first time in the following its individual inspection. The 3-year period begins on the 1 April in the year after the agency's last full inspection. For example, if an agency was last inspected in 2019 and March 2022, a new 3-year cycle begins on 1 April 2022.

We normally inspect an adoption support agency for the first time between 7 and 12 months from the date of the registration, unless no children or adults receive services from the agency.

Scheduling

The scheduling of inspection takes into account:

- legal requirements
- previous inspection findings
- complaints and concerns about the service
- supplementary information from children, foster carers, social workers and other organisations
- notifications
- monitoring reports given to Ofsted by adoption support agencies under regulation 24 of The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005

Where possible, the same inspection will not impact an agency for more than 3 consecutive inspection cycles. However, in certain instances, for example, if Ofsted's inspection of children's services is taking place, it may be appropriate to retain the same inspectors until the enforcement action has finished.

Length of inspection

For a full inspection of an adoption support agency, 1 inspector usually spends 2 days on site, which may be spread over 3 days. If an adoption support agency is a single person working from their home address, the time on site is likely to be reduced.

The inspector and the regulatory inspection manager (RIM) should determine how best to use the time available. The RIM may decide that it is more appropriate for the inspector to spend an additional day on site or additional inspection being deployed on the inspection.

Inspectors should determine whether:

- the amount of time on site should be reduced for inspections of small adoption support agencies
- additional resources, such as more inspectors or more time, is both proportionate and necessary for the agency, for agencies with a wide geographical spread or where there are specific issues, such as a serious incident, to consider

Deferrals

We will grant deferrals in line with our deferral policy.

Timeframe

Day	Full inspection activity
1	Preparation
2	In-person inspection
3	Half-day on-site visit*
4	Desk work
5	Half-day on-site visit*
6	Inspection evidence and report submitted for quality assurance
7	Draft report sent to the registered provider for any comments within a maximum of 48 working days of the visit
8	Provider returns the report within 5 working days with any comments
10	Final report sent to the registered provider within 30 working days of the end of the visit
11	Provider has opportunity to request a review of report within 20 working days of the end of the visit
14	The final report will be published on the Ofsted inspection website within a maximum of 38 working days from the end of the inspection

* The 2 half days on-site may be combined to 1 day, or 2 whole days can spent on site

Preparing for an inspection

Analysis and planning

Inspectors are allocated 1 day to prepare for an inspection of an adoption support agency. They should use this time to review the information held by Ofsted and to prepare for the inspection. Inspectors focused on such preparatory work may be based at home.

Inspectors will look at the information that Ofsted already holds about the agency, including:

- previous inspection reports
- any notifications received from the agency
- updated data and case sample submitted by the adoption support agency following notice of the inspection
- reports made under NMS 25 (full reports for individual providers)
- complaint questionnaires from adoptees, children, birth relatives and others
- the agency's statement of purpose and children's guide
- concerns and complaints made to Ofsted
- notifications of significant events made to Ofsted
- the agency's self-evaluation, if it is available and stronger
- the content of the provider's website
- any enforcement activity within the last inspection year

Some of this information is drawn together in the pre-inspection information portal and in the pre-inspection briefing.

The inspector should consider familiarise themselves with relevant background and contextual information, such as the most recent inspection of the local authority where the agency is situated.

If we have received information that indicates potential non-compliance with regulatory requirements, the inspector may need to request more information from the agency. The inspector usually outlines the concern to the registered person(s) and seeks to clarify the information we have received. The inspector should do this only in those circumstances where it is not appropriate to share all the information about a concern. Inspectors should not make assumptions about the information we have received. Sometimes, in where sharing the information could compromise an investigation, we cannot but by another agency, such as the police.

The inspector analyses the evidence and information and records their planning notes on the inspection database.

The plan for the inspection should identify:

- lines of enquiry
- any areas of apparent weakness or significant strength
- areas where further evidence needs to be gathered

The focus of the inspection may change during its course as further evidence emerges.

Questionnaires

Just before, Ofsted sends online questionnaires to gather a range of views about different groups of people. The inspection team. Also includes the views of:

- children
- parents and carers
- staff
- foster carers
- adoptees
- birth relatives
- other interested parties such as placing social workers and independent reviewing officers

We send links to the questionnaires directly to each provider by email and ask them to distribute these links on our behalf. The responses are submitted directly to Ofsted.

We will inform providers if the response rate for the service or setting and you think it is below the national average for that type of provision.

Where there are no responses for a service or setting, this also forms a line of enquiry for the inspection.

Notifications and reports made under national minimum standard 25

Inspectors must regularly review notifications and reports under NMS 25. Inspectors should use the information they receive from notifications and reports to understand how well the agency monitors its impact on the experiences of children and adults.

Information from any of these sources may lead to:

- further activity, such as speaking to the registered manager and/or individual registered provider or other stakeholders
- inspectors being rescheduled based on other identified concerns within reports and notifications, or because of the impact on children and adults
- a change of focus for an inspection, emerging lines of enquiry must be noted in the inspection database and informed the pre-inspection planning

Notifications
Registered persons (providers and managers) must notify Ofsted about specific events and incidents as set out in regulation 24(1) of the Adoption Support Agencies and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 (SI 2005/ 2149/reg 24) (links the specific events.

Online forms and free guidance about notifications are available. Agencies should always seek advice from their inspector about individual cases. The inspector contacts

If the inspector identifies issues that give them cause for concern about the welfare of children or adults, they will let the provider know that they have been done by notifications.

If notifications are incomplete, the inspector should always contact the agency or ask for more information.

Whenever there are concerns about the safety or welfare of a child or adult, the inspector must contact the agency's manager. Ofsted must be fully aware of what is being done by the agency and other relevant parties, such as the local authority and police, to protect children and adults who are at risk of harm.

Managers and staff should take into account the appropriate parts of the statutory guidance outlined in Working together to safeguard children.

If the inspector has any concern about the welfare of children or adults or the safeguarding of the agency, the inspector should discuss it in the writing with Ofsted's safeguarding team.

The DCS must be notified immediately of the concerns so that they can review the information. This information also informing the agency's risk assessment for future inspections.

Inspectors always monitor closely whether Ofsted is informed of the outcomes of any investigations or other actions taken by the agency or other agencies. If Ofsted has not been informed promptly, the inspector should contact the agency. Inspectors must follow up any failure to notify Ofsted of the outcome.

Reports made under national minimum standard 25
NMS 25.6 states that the executive side of the adoption support agency's trustees, board members or management committee members should:

- receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency, at least 6 monthly
- monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and service users
- satisfy themselves that the agency complies with the conditions of registration

As part of the pre-inspection preparation, inspectors consider the NMS 25 reports and any emerging lines of enquiry are recorded in the pre-inspection plan.

Individual providers do not need to make reports under this standard.

Reports can also be emailed to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. They must include Ofsted's unique reference number (URN) and the name and address of the agency.

The on-site inspection

Inspectors will prioritise carrying out inspections on site whenever possible.

However, agencies' ways of working (for example, staff working from home and/or using hot desking) may mean that it is not feasible for all inspection activities to be on site. This may include conversations with staff, children and adult service users.

The timing and the proportion of off-site and on-site activity are determined by the inspector and the regulatory inspection manager (RIM) based on the risk to the agency. Whatever the working arrangements may be, inspectors will arrange face to face meetings when this is necessary to secure the best evidence.

The start of the inspection

During COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions, inspectors will usually contact the agency immediately before arriving on site to establish what additional arrangements need to be put in place. This may include a phone call and may contact the provider from their car parked close to the setting.

At the start of an SCCIP inspection, the inspector confirms their identity by producing their Ofsted inspector identification. They do not need to carry paper copies of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

The inspector always meets with the registered manager/person in charge of the agency and the registered provider.

At the start of the inspection, the inspector agrees:

- a date for the pre-inspection
- arrangements for the inspection to be carried out, including:
  - the inspection's focus
  - the inspection's lines of enquiry
  - the inspection's methodology
  - the inspection's timetable
  - the inspection's resources
  - the inspection's risks
- the inspection's lines of enquiry
- the inspection's methodology
- the inspection's timetable
- the inspection's resources
- the inspection's risks
- the inspection's lines of enquiry
- the inspection's methodology
- the inspection's timetable
- the inspection's resources
- the inspection's risks

The inspector also gives the registered person(s) and manager an overview of the agency's strengths and weaknesses, based on the information we have received. The inspector also gives the registered person(s) and manager a summary of the agency's lines of enquiry. The inspector also gives the registered person(s) and manager a summary of the agency's lines of enquiry.

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The inspector has been prompted by our receiving information about a concern or complaint, or information from other organisations, the inspector should also give the agency a summary of the agency's lines of enquiry. This is so that the manager has the opportunity to raise the concerns. This also provides an opportunity for the manager to provide additional information to the inspector, which may mean that the lines of enquiry are not pursued. Where possible, if the information is from a private known or serious concerns, to remain anonymous, then the inspector must take the utmost care to ensure that the person's identity is not revealed.

Case tracking and sampling

Evaluating the experiences and progress of children is a core inspection activity. This is largely based on evidence from case tracking and sampling.

For tracked cases, inspectors take an in-depth look at the quality of the help and protection that individual children and adults have experienced. For sampled cases, inspectors look at elements of practice within individual cases, usually to follow lines of enquiry.

We consider it very important that children and adult service users receive high quality help and care and make progress.

We take into account individuals' starting points and circumstances during inspections. We recognise that even slight progress in a particular aspect of their lives may represent significant progress for individual children and adults. We also recognise that for some service users, because of their experiences of trauma, abuse or neglect, progress is not always straightforward. Progress in one area may result in deterioration in another as they work through the consequences of their experiences.

Children and adults' overall experiences and progress are, in part, a result of how well leaders and managers understand the needs of their service users. Inspectors consider the help and protection that children and adult service users receive, and how well it is coordinated, based on their current and previous experiences and progress' judgement.

Inspectors look for evidence that progress and outcomes are being sustained.

Inspectors will also use the attention of the inspection team to ask questions across the range of the adoption support agency's work. Where providers have worked with children who have been placed for adoption, inspectors will also explore how the service users who have experienced the adoption process feel about the outcome of the inspection.

Inspectors also sample elements of other cases to follow specific lines of enquiry.

The size of the agency and the nature of any line of enquiries determine how many cases are sampled.

Tracked and sampled cases should be selected by the inspector from the case list provided.

Case files (either electronic or paper-based) are usually discussed with the allocated social worker and their manager. Inspectors may also need to look at other relevant recording systems. In the discussion of the allocated worker, a collaborative approach is asked to avoid:

- inspectors focusing only one aspect of tracking children and adults' journeys. Inspectors should be understanding of carers' experiences through assessment, support and other sources, such as observation of practice and discussions with individuals involved.

Inspectors examine, discuss and evaluate cases in line with the evaluation criteria. Inspectors will seek evidence that the agency has had a positive impact on the children and adults' experiences and outcomes, and evidence that the agency has made a difference to the lives of children and adults.

The detail of activities carried out and discussions held varies depending on the lines of enquiry for each individual inspection.

Inspectors must record the initials of children, professionals or carers who have been tracked, sampled and/or interviewed as part of an inspection within the evidence base.

Listening and talking to children

The views and experiences of children and adult service users provide important evidence of their experience of services.

Inspectors assess how well the agency consults with children and other service users. Children's views gathered by the agency are taken into account as part of the inspection evidence.

Inspectors also talk to and seek children and other service users during the inspection. Inspectors may use different approaches, such as individual or group meetings, or a pre-arranged time. Sometimes, inspectors will spend time observing activities and practice. Inspectors will also talk to children and other service users informally with them. This is to avoid any stress caused to children. These approaches will be discussed throughout the inspection as necessary.

Many of the experiences of children and other service users take place after the normal school, college or work day and it is essential that inspectors are able to speak to children, young people and service users at times and in locations that are convenient for them. Opportunities to speak to the views and experiences of children and adults include:

- meeting service users at pre-arranged times
- phone calls to service users
- attending service user groups that may run during the inspection.

Communication methods

Inspectors will be mindful of the limits of verbal consultation with some children, particularly those who are disabled or have complex health care needs, and they should take this into account in their evaluation. In these cases, they would expect to see the agency's evidence of how it has sought the views of children and how it has shared them with feedback about the impact of their consultation.

Inspectors must take into account the specific communication needs of individual children. For some children, the inspectors may request the assistance of a carer's or an independent person who knows and understand the individual's preferred means of communication. Inspectors may also need to use, or be asked by the agency appropriate for inspectors to employ, sign language, other communication aids and how they interact with carers, professionals and their environment.

Inspectors can request the services of an interpreter to join the inspection team. Inspectors may also need to use, or be asked by the agency to employ, a translator. Inspectors request this service through the inspection team and give 2 weeks' notice where possible.

Children or adults, including those with limited or no verbal communication, may want to share their views in a letter to the inspection.

Practice when gathering the views of children

Inspectors demonstrate good practice practice by:

- falling staff and carers when and where conversations with children and adult service users are to take place during the inspection
- being sensitive to the fact that carers and service users, including children, may not want to be involved in the inspection
- being sensitive to the fact that children may feel and not include comments that will identify them in the inspection report or in feedback to staff, carers or other professionals
- ensuring that staff are aware of any arranged meetings between inspectors and service users and that children or adult service users may leave the meeting at any time
- where appropriate, explaining to service users that information suggesting that they or another child or adult is at risk of harm will be passed by the inspector to appropriate agencies, and that this information may be shared with other agencies.

Inspectors respect the privacy and confidentiality of personal information at all times. We keep receive insight into any decisions about children's involvement in the inspection.

Observing activities

Inspectors can use the agency's normal scheduling of activities as opportunities for observing and following lines of enquiry. These activities could include:

- staff meetings
- visits to people in social worker to service user
- support groups

Inspectors always try to strike a balance between the time it takes to observe an activity and the significance of the likely evidence to be gained.

Gathering views of other professionals

Inspectors consult with professionals to inform the inspection findings. This is usually through a questionnaire call during the inspection and may not take place on one. These professionals include:

- social workers
- parents/carers
- local authority commissioners

Inspectors ask the agency for the relevant contact details.

Inspectors should always take account of views and of confidentiality when talking to stakeholders on the telephone during the inspection.

Discussions with managers and staff

Individual interviews are held with the registered manager or individual registered manager, and other staff as necessary. The number of staff interviewed individually depends on the size of the adoption agency, but will include a sample of staff working in the agency at the time of inspection.

The inspector always aims to interview the responsible individual where:

- there is no manager in post
- the responsible individual has ability of care and support, or the effectiveness of monitoring and quality assurance of inspection and management of the scheme
- evidence indicates that the agency is failing to protect children
- there are concerns about staffing, the premises or resources to manage and run the service.

The interview with the registered manager or individual registered provider usually covers:

- issues that have arisen from pre-inspection information or emerging lines of inquiry
- how the manager involves service users
- the use or progress in response to previous requirements and recommendations
- the plans for future development of the adoption support agency
- the arrangements for supervision received by the manager, including for an individual provider
- any further evidence the manager may wish to highlight with the inspector

During the inspection, the inspector shares emerging findings about the agency's strengths and areas for improvement with the manager at the end of any discussion on issues.

The inspector usually meets with the manager at the end of day to share emerging findings. The inspector will normally set out for the manager what they intend to discuss with staff and managers. The inspector will also inform the manager about the direct the inspector to pay specific information or evidence requests.

Shortfalls that could have an immediate impact on the safety of staff or children are brought to the attention of the manager as soon as possible after the inspector identifies problem.

Inspectors should be ready to alter arrangements if staff have to attend the needs of service users.

Assessing financial viability

The adoption support agency regulations state that the 'registered provider must carry on the agency in such manner as is likely to ensure that it will be financially viable for the purpose of meeting the requirements in these regulations and in the National Minimum Standards' (Part 2 The Adoption Support Agencies (England and Wales) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005).

Inspectors are only expected to carry out a 'paper-based' assessment of the financial information. Where, during the course of a routine inspection, the inspector has concerns about the financial viability of the agency, the inspector will refer the matter to the social care commission headquarters.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection usual ranges from professionally produced business plans to a collection of accounts and balance sheets (Regulation 25(2) of The Adoption Support Agencies (England and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005)

Examining records, policies and procedures

The adoption support agency's statement of purpose and, where relevant, children's guide should be available on their website and form part of the inspection pack. We should also hold copies in our database because agencies are required to submit these documents to Ofsted whenever they are changed.

Inspectors do not routinely examine all policies and procedures. Inspectors examine those policies that are relevant to the lines of enquiry and evidence gathered.

Inspectors focus on the impact of documents such as the assessments and how they work in practice, rather than the format. Ofsted makes it that they are fit for purpose and that they are being used to the relevant people so that they can provide sound safety and appropriate.

The inspector may ask to look at the personnel records of anyone working for the purpose of the agency, which can be maintained in electronic or paper-based formats. The information available for inspection should reflect schedule 7 of The Adoption Support Agencies (England and Wales) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 (SI 2005/2149) and must include the reference number of the subject's DBS check. The inspector may sample more detailed personnel records if necessary to evaluate the information provided in such a manner as the inspector considers needed to pursue a line of enquiry.

If recruitment records are not maintained at the premises where the inspector is based on the inspection, the provider should arrange for any files requested by the inspector to be brought to the inspection.

Where the agency uses the DBS update service to check the status of an individual's DBS certificate, the agency should be able to demonstrate how it uses and records details of any check it carries out. If any lines of enquiry require additional information, the inspector may request that the provider supply all DBS paperwork which is made available at the inspection.

Where members of staff are subject to transfer of undertakings (protection of employment) (TUPE) arrangements, we recognise that the new employer is relied on the previous employer for all recruitment records relating to those staff and in some cases, the TUPE process may not have allowed for the transfer of all records required by the regulations. If this is the case we expect the new employer to have obtained the information required by the regulations and to have made it part of the staff's records. If there are any gaps in recruitment records, the new employer should have taken steps to assure themselves that the staff member is fit to work with children. We would include reference to employment records such as appraisals.

Finding evidence of possible offences

If, during the course of the inspection, the inspector thinks that an offence may have been committed, they should contact a social care commission lawyer who will advise on the action to be taken and discuss whether the inspection is proceeding as usual.

Further guidance is available in the social care compliance handbook.

Implications of the Equality Act

The Equality Act 2010 came into effect on 1 October 2010. The Act makes it unlawful for an employer to ask substantial employee questions about their health or disability before they are offered employment, whether on a conditional or unconditional basis.

Social care providers must comply with the Equality Act and in their work specifically with the Act's provisions in employing people who are ill, disabled or have a mental disorder.

To comply with both laws, providers may give conditional offers of employment to potential employees after the recruitment process, subject to appropriate medical and health checks.

There are a number of exemptions to the provisions in the Act. If a provider believes that it is subject to exemptions to the provisions of Act, it should seek its own legal advice on the matter.

Inspectors will assess whether providers have a rigorous recruitment and vetting process in place, including ensuring that their employees are medically and physically fit before they begin work as part of their inspection.

How inspectors record the evidence

Inspectors must analyse the information they gather on inspection and use their professional judgement to assess the impact on the experiences and progress of children and other service users.

Inspectors' evidence should be clear, evaluative and sufficient to support the judgements.

The evidence should tell the story of the experiences and progress of children and other service users. It should show how well the agency has had a positive impact on the identity individual's where it is necessary to protect a child or to support children and adult service users to achieve their aspirations and potential.

Inspectors can record direct quotes from children, adult service users and other interpreted parties in evidence to support judgements.

The record should clearly indicate the source of the evidence (for example, whether the evidence is from observation, a written record or a face-to-face interview). It should also cross-from an interview. The record must indicate the time of the interview and the location of the interview, if it is not a face-to-face interview.

Throughout the inspection, inspectors maintain a record of their evidence. Electronic evidence is recorded within the inspection database. Summarised evidence must be sufficient to support the judgements. Inspectors should be able to demonstrate that judgements are based and any requirements that stem from the judgements.

After the summarised evidence has been placed on the inspection database, inspectors should not destroy any duplicate handwritten evidence until at least 10 days after the inspection. Inspectors should destroy any duplicate evidence after the inspection report is written. Inspectors may refer to it in the questioning and investigation of any complaint or a complaint about the judgement is being considered.

All handwritten evidence should be legible and dated. Handwritten evidence that has not been summarised forms part of the inspection evidence base and should therefore be dated and signed with the initials of the inspector within 5 working days of the inspection.

Evidence may be scrutinised for quality assurance and will be considered in the event of any complaint.

End of the inspection and feedback

The inspector will give verbal feedback of the main findings and provisional judgements. This feedback will usually be given to the registered manager or individual registered provider (as appropriate). Additional senior staff may also attend. If agreed in advance with the registered manager or individual registered provider, the inspector may ask the inspection feedback to take place jointly with the agency's feedback. The day of feedback is counted as the last day of the inspection.

The inspector should:

- cover the main findings of the inspection, including both strengths and weaknesses.
- clearly communicate the likely judgements
- indicate the extent to which the agency has met the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection. Inspectors should also indicate the impact of the inspection description and the extent to clearly indicate how the judgements have been made.
- confirm when the draft report will be sent to the manager for comments.

Inspectors will not provide a written copy of the inspection feedback to the agency in advance of the inspection report being sent. Providers may choose to take their own notes of feedback.

Making requirements and recommendations

Requirements

Inspectors impose requirements when there has been a breach of a regulation.

When imposing a requirement, inspectors must ensure that there is sufficient evidence to support the requirement. The evidence should show that the breach of the law is likely to have an impact, on children and adult service users' experiences and progress. They must weigh up and balance evidence from more than one source to support memory requirements.

The requirement should refer to the specific regulation and should be detailed enough to allow the provider to understand what is required. The aim is to make the intention of regulation and a date by which they should achieve this.

In deciding whether to impose a requirement, the inspector must access the extent of the impact on children and adult service users' experiences and progress and whether the matter could have been more appropriately by making a recommendation.

The inspector will always impose requirements where there are significant concerns for the welfare, safety and quality of care for children and other service users.

Sometimes, the registered person needs to take action to meet a requirement that they can complete quickly. Inspectors can impose a requirement with a date that is likely to be less than 28 days from the date of the inspection report. Inspectors do not need to wait for the date of the inspection feedback and the requirement and its deadline is.

Recommendations

Inspectors make recommendations when necessary to improve practice.

In making a recommendation, inspectors should refer to the NPSN for adoption support agencies. The NPSN sets out the 'minimum' that people should expect from services and what they need to do. The standards set out NPSN should be examined by inspectors and also make recommendations in relation to other relevant statutory guidance such as:

- Working together to safeguard children
- Statutory guidance for children who run away or go missing from home or care

If, during an inspection, the registered person notifies a minor administrative error that has minimal impact on the experiences and progress of children and adult service users, inspectors may choose to make a recommendation instead of a requirement. In such circumstances, inspectors should be satisfied that the error is not a pattern of poor practice.

Where the registered person has failed to comply with a requirement within the timescale set by the inspector, we consider carefully whether it is necessary to take any enforcement action to address the breach and the associated risks to children and adults. Enforcement action may include, but is not limited to, issuing a compliance notice.

If the agency has not acted on recommendations made at a previous inspection, the inspector considers carefully the impact of this on children and adult service users and may impose a requirement.

Compliance notices and enforcement action

Ofsted's compliance powers are set out in the Care Standards Act 2000 and associated regulations. Ofsted's enforcement policy is available on its website.

We serve a compliance notice following an inspection if:

- we consider that this is the most appropriate way to promote the welfare of children or we believe that they are at risk of harm or being harmed
- a registered provider has failed to comply with a requirement made at an inspection that we consider that this is the most appropriate way to deal with the issue.

Inadequate judgements: next steps

When an adoption support agency is judged inadequate for the overall experiences, and progress of children and adult service users, this leads to such inspection reports as quickly as possible, and then a one review. The timing of the review should be proportionate to the risk and priority to ensure that it working days following the inspection.

The inspector and their manager have the post inspection brief deliver. It provides an opportunity for them to discuss the inspection and the quality of the report. It also is to consider a recommendation for further action to take to the case review. The recommendation should be based on the evidence in the report, the provider's response and compliance action. The social care compliance handbook has further information about the enforcement options available and the arrangements for monitoring compliance with notices.

The case review considers the recommended future action and allows the manager to decide what action to take.

We usually carry out full inspection of agencies that have been judged as inadequate within 6 to 12 months of the previous inspection. The timing and nature of subsequent inspections will be based on risks following our inadequate judgement, taking into account our risk assessment.

If the concerns are serious, we are likely to return to carry out a monitoring visit to check that the manager or individual registered provider have taken sufficient action to safeguard and protect the welfare of children. Any monitoring visit usually results in a full inspection. We usually carry out the full inspection within 6 working days, or exceptional circumstances.

An inspection visit takes place sooner if:

- any further significant concerns arise during this period
- it is necessary to make statutory requirements to safeguard and protect the welfare of children.

The inspection report

The inspector writes the inspection report. Inspectors' analysis must includes clear evidence for their judgements and recommendations.

Published reports will usually be between 10 and 12 pages long but may be shorter. Reports for agencies that have several enhancements or that have judged to be outstanding may require more detailed explanations for the judgements. Inspectors must always ensure that the reports are long enough to say what needs to be said and no longer.

Content of the SCCIP report

Section of report	Details
Information about the service	Brief contextual information about the service
Data and judgement of last inspection	The data and overall judgement of the last inspection
Inspection methodology and information	Inspection methodology, including information about the inspection process and any pre-inspection information
Inspection judgements	The judgements made and accompanying text
Areas for improvement	The recommendations and requirements (where applicable)
Information about the inspection	The dates of inspection and information about the inspectors involved
Service details	Information on the provider running the service

Quality assurance and arrangements for publishing the report

The inspector is responsible for the quality of the report. The inspector will check the completed draft report carefully before submitting to their manager for pre-publication quality checks before it is shared with the provider.

Any proposed change of judgement from the provisional judgement given at verbal feedback must be discussed with the manager and the inspection team before sending Ofsted. On these occasions, the inspector must inform the provider of the revised judgements and give reasons for the changes before the provider receives the draft report.

We will send the draft inspection report to the provider for comment at the end of the inspection.

The provider will have 5 working days to comment on the draft report, process and findings.

We will consider all comments and we will respond to the comments when we share the final report with the provider. This will be within a maximum of 20 working days after the inspection.

Following the inspection, we will not consider for feedback about the inspection through a post-inspection survey. This is sent to the provider at the same time as when they receive both the draft and final inspection reports. We ask our feedback from providers to improve the quality of inspections.

Conduct during inspections

It is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a positive working relationship. Inspectors should demonstrate exemplary behaviour. Both must follow guidance in Ofsted's conduct inspection policy.

Concerns or complaints about an inspection

Concerns

Most of Ofsted's work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns do arise, we will try to resolve them with the provider's manager or staff at the time of the inspection during the inspection visit. The provider an opportunity to resolve the matter before the inspection is completed. Inspection.

If the provider is unable to resolve the matter with the inspector, they should contact the inspector's NPSN further discussion.

Providers also have another opportunity to express concerns about the draft inspection report, process and findings when they receive the draft report.

Complaints

If they not wish to resolve to resolve concerns, a formal complaint can be raised under Ofsted's complaints procedure before the final inspection report is published.

If the provider wishes to submit a formal complaint, it must have until the end of the fifth working day after receiving the final inspection report.

Monitoring visits

Monitoring visits are carried out according to the general principles of the SCCIP.

Monitoring visits are usually carried out for one of the following reasons:

- to follow up concerns
- to follow up complaints

- to monitor compliance with a notice

Timing and frequency

The decision to carry out a monitoring visit is usually taken at a case review. The frequency of monitoring visits is decided on a case-by-case basis and may be as frequent as weekly if that is needed. Timing and frequency are determined by any dates included in compliance notices and the nature of the concerns.

A compliance notice sets out the actions a provider must take by a certain date to meet the relevant service-specific regulations for children's social care providers. This is agreed and recorded at the case review.

The inspector will tell the provider that it is the subject of monitoring following enforcement action or an inadequate inspection judgement. Monitoring visits are usually unannounced.

Compliance notices

Where we establish a number of actions on a statutory notice, or on multiple notices with different compliance completion dates, we schedule follow-up visits for each date or notice to ensure that the provider has met each specified action within the prescribed timescale.

We aim to complete follow-up visits the day after the required completion date for each notice or, at the very latest, within 5 working days of that date. In some instances, we may timetable the monitoring visit so that we can assess compliance with more than one notice.

We may decide, in exceptional circumstances, not to carry out a follow-up visit to check that the provider has met a specific requirement in a notice. In these cases, we will accept written confirmation that the provider has taken the required action, if the provider's written confirmation is accompanied by documentary evidence such as a photograph or a copy of a required procedure.

We make a note on the inspection database of the reasons why it was not necessary to visit, for example if a fire officer has carried out a visit and given written confirmation of action taken, copied to Ofsted.

Monitoring visits are also likely to be agreed as part of the plan for the provider once the notice of proposal to cancel has been issued.

Other circumstances where we might carry out monitoring visits include those when a 'restriction of accommodation' notice is in place or when we have suspended a provider from continuing to operate.

Following the monitoring visit, we will send a report detailing the outcome of the visit. We will publish it on our reports website alongside the inspection reports.

Preparing for the monitoring visit

When preparing for a monitoring visit, inspectors take into account:

- the last inspection report
- requirement(s) set out in the last inspection report
- requirement(s) set out in any compliance notice
- letters from previous monitoring inspections
- any notifications received since the last inspection
- any action plan provided by the setting
- any other information recorded on the inspection database, such as information from other agencies, or complaints
- any enforcement action that should be monitored (for example, restriction of accommodation)

How inspectors carry out monitoring visits

Where the monitoring visit is carried out following an inadequate judgement, or to monitor the agency's response to compliance notices, or to determine whether requirements have been completed, it should:

- determine whether the requirements have been completed, and the impact of any completed requirements on the welfare and outcomes for children and other service users
- identify whether any additional concerns exist
- determine the capacity of the registered manager or individual registered provider to sustain the changes required
- consider any further action that may need to be taken
- review the evidence in order to determine whether a new inspection judgement can be made

Where the monitoring visit is to monitor other concerns or issues, it should:

- determine whether the effectiveness of the setting has declined or improved
- determine the impact of any improvement or decline in practice on the welfare and outcomes for children
- set out any further action that may need to be taken

The inspector must notify either the registered provider or registered manager when they arrive on site.

The inspector should judge how effective the improvement is and how, by tackling the requirements or issues, the setting has improved the experiences and progress of children and other service users.

To demonstrate the necessary improvement, providers and managers need to show that their actions have had a significant impact in achieving clear and sustainable progress. Good intentions and an inspirational outlook, or a recent change of manager following a period of poor leadership, do not in themselves give enough proof of the ability of the provider to sustain improvement.

Finding further concerns during monitoring visits

If it becomes clear that there are new or further issues of concern, or that is lacking the actions from the last inspection the provider has set out other aspects slip so that children or vulnerable adults are at risk of harm or are not making sufficient progress, then the inspector should decide what further action needs to be taken. This includes new requirements, recommendations, compliance notices or other enforcement action such as restriction of accommodation or imposing of conditions.

If the inspector is concerned or unsure about any aspect of the visit, they can contact their RIPI or a social care compliance inspector.

How inspectors gather evidence in a monitoring visit

The inspectors will question how effective the provider's actions are in:

- meeting the requirements set at the last inspection
- improving the experiences and progress of children

Evidence should be recorded in the inspection database. The evidence should reflect the areas for improvement that were identified in the inspection report. This section should include evidence of the most significant strengths and weaknesses and any new areas of improvement or breaches of requirement that need to be taken forward. The inspector must decide whether the agency has let other aspects slip so that there is now cause for concern in different areas.

Inspectors must decide whether the provider demonstrates its capacity to sustain any improvements it has made. Inspectors should also decide whether the improvements are having a marked and sustained impact on all areas of weakness.

Feedback at the end of the monitoring visit

The inspector provides verbal feedback to the provider at the end of the visit. The inspector must:

- be clear about the evidence base on which the judgement of improvement or continued concern is based on
- make clear any new issues to take forward
- ensure that the provider is clear about the outcome of the visit and what the next step will be, especially if a new issue has arisen or improvement is required
- be clear with the provider when the next steps will be confirmed if the inspector requires further advice
- explain that the outcome of a monitoring visit is published in the form of a report on the Ofsted reports site alongside the last report
- make clear that the text of the report may differ slightly from the oral feedback, but that the substance of the issues will not change
- ensure that the provider understands that the overall judgement of inadequate has not changed (where relevant), although progress and improvements may have been made
- be clear, if a new inspection judgement has been made, why this is the case and what the new judgement is or why no change to the judgement has been made

After any monitoring visit following an inadequate judgement, the inspector must contact the DCS of the placing authorities (where relevant) to advise them whether:

- there has been a change of judgement, and if that new judgement is, and the nature and effectiveness of any improvements
- there has been no change of judgement and the original concerns remain or new ones have emerged

Monitoring reports

Ofsted will publish all monitoring reports on its reports website, although RIPIs can decide not to publish monitoring reports in exceptional circumstances.

At the beginning of the report, inspectors should provide a concise, clear explanation of the issues that we mentioned at the visit. This explanation should accurately reflect the message given to the manager/person in charge when we announced the visit.

The next sentence should then state when we last visited the setting, and for what reason.

Monitoring reports should outline the significant developments and evidence of progress that has occurred since the last visit. They should clearly explain the action the provider has taken to address the requirements and the impact of any improvement, or not, on the care, experiences and progress of children and any other service users.

The report must:

- set out the reason(s) for and purpose of the visit (if the visit is to follow up enforcement activity, the letter should clearly set this out, for example, 'This agency is subject to a restriction of accommodation order. We are concerned that ...' In order to evaluate the progress the agency has made in addressing these concerns, we will visit on a monthly basis'. If the visit is to follow up an inadequate judgement, there should be a short summary of the number of times and the outcome of the areas for concern)
- outline any significant developments and clearly explain the action the provider has taken to address the requirements and the impact
- evaluate where progress has been made and where progress has not been made
- clearly state the impact of continued concerns on children, alongside any action that Ofsted will be taking to notify placing local authorities or to protect children
- set out clearly where and what further action is needed
- set out why a new judgement has been made or the reasons why the judgement will not be changed, if appropriate

Inspectors must use clear language to indicate the level of concern, for example, 'this visit has raised serious concerns about care and practice in [the agency]'.

Inspectors can clearly state that the provider is likely to be subject to further enforcement action where this is the case. The details of enforcement action cannot be included as this may prejudice any action we are likely to take and could be seen to impede the provider's right of appeal, when relevant.

Review of the monitoring report and evidence base

The monitoring visit report and evidence base will be reviewed by the inspector's manager before it is sent to the RIPI for quality checks. This is to ensure that they accurately reflect the improvements made and that the evidence base supports any further enforcement action we may wish to take.

The draft monitoring report is then shared with the provider and finalised using the same process and timescales as a standard inspection report (see the Quality assurance and arrangements for publishing the report section).

Checks on responsible individuals

Regulation 7 of the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 requires adoption support agencies to have a responsible individual.

A provider must demonstrate to Ofsted that the responsible individual they appoint is able to meet the requirements of regulation. Our inspectors scrutinise the steps providers have taken to determine that a responsible individual who has been appointed to a registered establishment or agency is fit to supervise its management.

For further information, see Changes to children's social care services that are registered and/or inspected by Ofsted.

Agencies with no registered manager

The Care Standards Act 2000 requires any person who carries on or manages an adoption support agency to be registered with Ofsted. It is a criminal offence to operate or manage an adoption support agency without registering with Ofsted (section 11 of the Care Standards Act 2000).

Regulations 26 and 27 of the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (2005) require the provider to notify Ofsted if the manager is to be absent for 28 days or more, or if they leave. Providers must do this at least one month before a known absence of the manager and, in an emergency, within 1 week of a manager being absent for 28 days.

Any failure to notify Ofsted of the absence or change of a manager, or failure to put in place satisfactory management arrangements, will be taken into account when planning and carrying out inspections. For more information, see Changes to children's social care services that are registered and/or inspected by Ofsted.

Actions may include, but are not limited to, bringing the date of the inspection forward, and using this information in our judgement about the leadership and management of the agency. If a provider fails to notify Ofsted of a change of manager, this may also influence our assessment of its fitness to manage. For more information about what regulatory action Ofsted can take, you should refer to the social care compliance handbook.

Incomplete inspections

We will apply Ofsted's policy on incomplete inspections where appropriate.

Safeguarding and child protection concerns

If serious issues of concern arise during the inspection, such as a failure to follow child protection procedures, or a lack of information about the whereabouts of children, the inspector must notify the responsible individual (where relevant) or the person in charge as soon as possible. If that may compromise a child or adult's safety, the inspector must ensure that the appropriate authorities are notified immediately.

Inspectors should always follow Ofsted's safeguarding policy.

Inspectors should contact their manager or regional social care compliance inspector if they need advice. The inspector ensures that referrals are made to the relevant local authority children's services and the child's allocated social worker and/or the relevant local authority adults' services, and, where appropriate, the vulnerable adult's allocated social worker. You can find further guidance in Safeguarding concerns: guidance for inspectors. Any concerns relate to allegations against staff, they are referred to the designated officer.

Inspectors must ensure that concerns about the safety and welfare of a child are communicated immediately to the DCS for the responsible placing local authority, and to the relevant Ofsted office, no later than one more than one hour. The regional Senior Her Majesty's Inspector should follow up the action that has been taken by the local authority.

The 'Prevent' duty

Extremism is unlikely to be a routine line of enquiry during SCCIF inspections. Inspectors should, however, be alert to signs of risks of extremism, such as literature, posters, videos or DVDs, or regular visitors to the setting where the purpose of their visit is not clear. Initial enquiries about the possibility of extremism must be directed to the manager or person in charge.

Inspectors should note the detail of any relevant concerns or referrals made by the registered manager or individual registered provider and how effective the emergency response has been. The DfE has published advice for schools and childcare providers on the 'Prevent' duty, and inspectors should note where this applies to the type of setting inspected.

Inspectors can contact their RPI, who may seek specialist advice. If inspectors are unable to contact their RPI and remain concerned, they should follow Ofsted's safeguarding policy.

Female genital mutilation: the duty to notify police

Since 31 October 2015, when section 74 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 inserted new section 5B into the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, specified regulated professionals (including social workers) must report to the police any cases of female genital mutilation in girls under 18 that they come across in their work.

The duty applies where the professional either:

- is informed by the girl that an act of female genital mutilation has been carried out on her
- observes physical signs that appear to show an act of female genital mutilation has carried out and has no reason to believe that the act was necessary for the girl's physical or mental health or for purposes connected with labour or birth

If a child discloses information regarding female genital mutilation to an inspector, the inspector should follow Ofsted's safeguarding guidance for inspectors.

Reporting concerns about the administration and management of controlled drugs

If inspectors come across concerns or incidents about the safe management of controlled drugs during their inspection duties, or receive information through any other source, they should email an outline of the concern and action taken to the social care policy team: socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk.

This action is in addition to any regulatory action or recommendations made as a result of the concern. Reports should be made even where no requirements or recommendations are to be made. The social care policy team will collate all these referrals and share them with the CQC's Controlled Drugs National Group.

Detailed information about controlled drugs (examples include morphine, pethidine, methadone and Ritalin) is available from the Care Quality Commission.

Use of personal data

As part of our inspection activities under the SCCIF, we may gather personal data that is necessary to help us evaluate children's social care services.

Our personal information charter sets out the standards you can expect from Ofsted when we collect, hold or use personal information, and that we will follow all applicable data protection legislation in how we treat personal information.

Our privacy notice for social care sets out in more detail what data we collect and our powers to do so, what we do with it, how long we keep it for and people's rights under data protection legislation.

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