

Social care inspection: the children's audit

A report of children's views

by the Children's Rights Director for England



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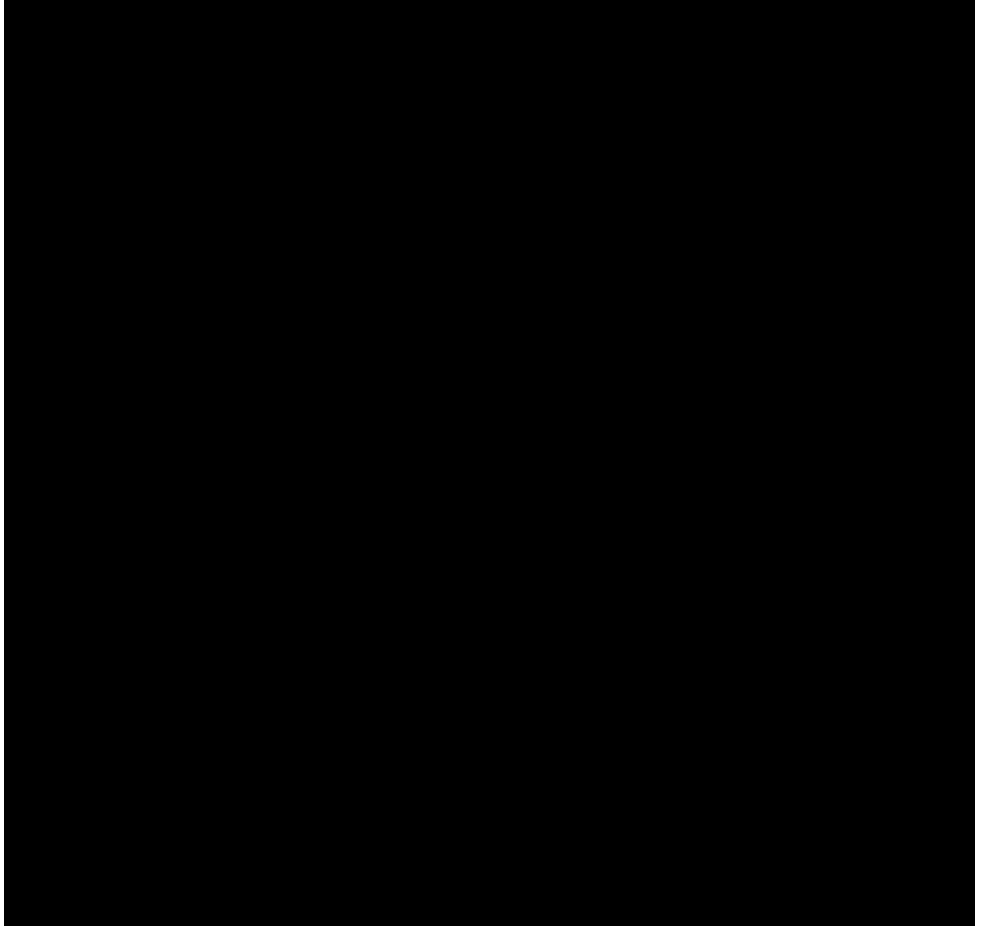
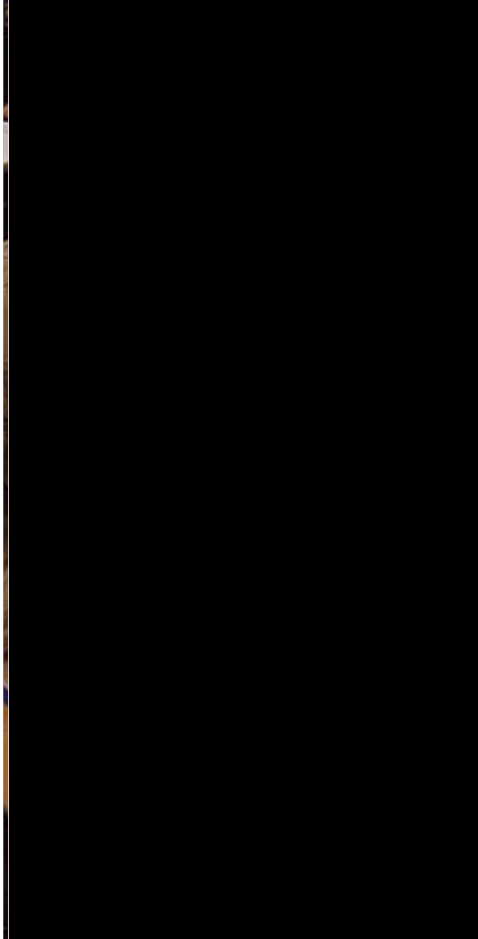


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Introduction



Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England

As Children's Rights Director for England, the law gives me the duty to ask children and young people living away from home or getting help from social care services for their views about their rights, their welfare and how they are looked after in England.

Ofsted, the organisation that inspects schools, children's homes, colleges and children's social care services, asked me to find out what children and young people living away from home in boarding schools, residential special schools, colleges or children's homes thought about Ofsted's inspections of where they live. I and my team asked children, after their home or school had been through an inspection, about their experience of the inspection and what they thought of it. We did this independently of any of the inspectors or their managers, and this report says exactly what the children told us. We have not left out or changed anything we or Ofsted might disagree with. This report is the children's view of a series of Ofsted's inspections in 2011. It is based on responses to a web survey from 224 children, about a total of 60 different inspections.

As well as asking children and young people for their views, I and my team give advice on children's and young people's views and on children's rights and welfare to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the government. I also have a duty to raise any issues I think are important about the rights and welfare of children or young people in care, getting children's social care support or living away from home. We do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

Our reports of children's views are all written so that they can be read easily by everyone – including children, professionals and government ministers. You can find and download copies of all our children's views reports on our children's website: www.rights4me.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Roger Morgan'.

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How we asked the children for their views

We used a web survey to ask children for their views and experiences of recent Ofsted inspections of their children's homes or boarding schools. We wrote to homes and schools that had recently been inspected, and asked them to pass on our invitations to children there to fill in our survey. We sent these children passwords to the survey so that only the people we invited could take part. The survey ran from January to February 2011.

It is important to say that we were therefore asking children about inspections that took place before April 2011, when Ofsted started making changes to how it does its inspections. We will be doing another survey later on to see what children think of Ofsted's new inspections.

Where people asked for paper copies of the survey, rather than filling it in online, we entered their answers on the computer when the paper copy was sent back to us. We were able to send copies of the survey in different languages for anyone who asked.

In this report we have set out the answers children and young people gave us to every question we asked them. Where we asked an 'open question' without giving choices to choose from, we have given all the answers that came from more than one in 10 of the children who answered that question. We have only given percentages where more than 100 children answered the question.

Where we have put a child or young person's exact words in this report as a quotation, this is because what they wrote was a good example of what others had said, or was a clear summary of what others had said.

Although 224 children sent in answers to our audit survey, not all of them answered all the questions, and some questions were answered by far fewer children than this. The main reason for this is that only 149 of the children told us they had known the inspection was happening, so only these 149 would have been able to answer our questions about their experiences of the inspection.

In this report, we have checked each of the sets of answers to see if there is any big difference between children aged 14 and under and young people aged 15 and over, between boys and girls, or between children living in children's homes, boarding schools or residential special schools. We have counted a 'big' difference as a difference of 10 percentage points or more. Where there is a big difference, we have said so.

The children who gave us their views

Altogether, 224 children and young people took part in our audit survey and sent their survey responses to us. The oldest was 19 and the youngest was seven. The average age was 14. Sixty-four per cent were boys, 36% were girls.

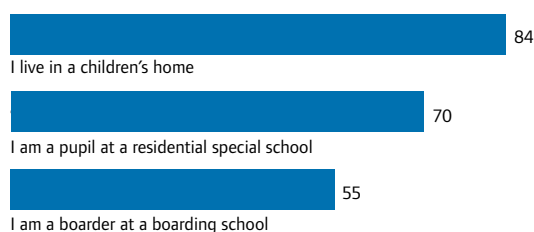
Out of the 210 children and young people who answered a question about their ethnic background, 80% told us they were white, 8% said they were of mixed race, 6% that they were black, and 5% that they were Asian.

We asked whether any of the children and young people were asylum seekers. Only one said that they were.

We asked whether those who answered our survey were disabled, and 202 answered this question. Of those who answered, 69 said they were disabled. We asked what sort of disability they had, and the two most frequent ones were autism (17 of the children said they were autistic) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (16 said they had ADHD).

Figure 1 shows how many children told us they came from each of the three types of setting – children’s homes, residential special schools and boarding schools.

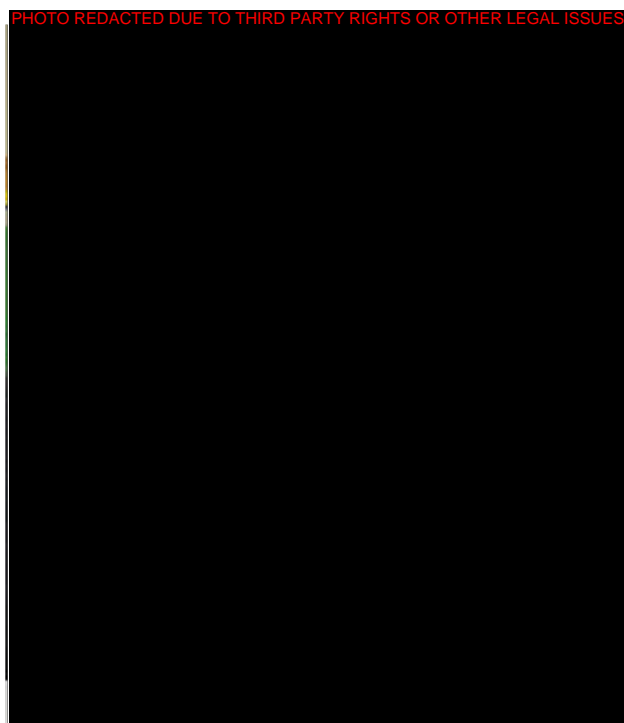
Figure 1: Numbers of children answering the question ‘Where are you living?’



Based on answers from 209 children.

Overall, out of those who answered this question for us, **84 of the children were writing to us about their experiences of children’s homes inspections**, 70 about residential special school inspections and 55 about boarding school inspections. However, this is not the whole story, because we had more children reporting in to us about each school inspection than about each children’s home inspection. This is to be expected, because generally more children live in each boarding or residential special school than in each children’s home.

Through our survey, **we received children’s reports on 56 different inspections of children’s homes, but only two inspections of residential special schools and two inspections of boarding schools.** We have to be slightly careful in giving these numbers. They come from where the children told us they lived, but some children from boarding schools or residential special schools did not give an answer telling us which school they came from. **The main focus of this report is on what children thought about Ofsted’s inspections of children’s homes in 2011.**

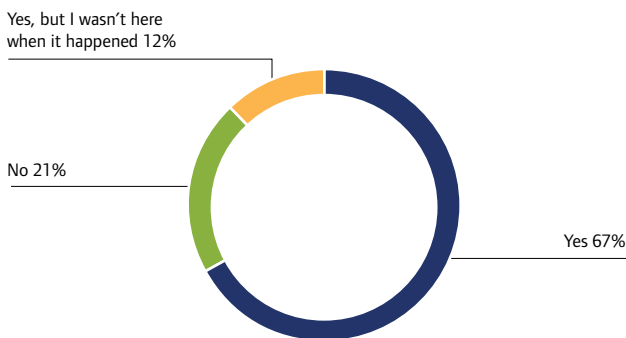


Knowing about the inspection

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We wanted to find out whether children actually knew there had been an inspection of their home or school recently. We asked them whether they already knew about the inspection before getting our questionnaire about it. Figure 2 gives their answers.

Figure 2: Percentages of children responding to the question 'Before getting the questionnaire, did you know that there had recently been an inspection?'



Based on answers from all 224 children.

Out of the 224 children in our survey, 67% (just over two thirds) told us they had known about the recent inspection of the home or school they were living in, compared with 21% who said they had not known about it until they got our questionnaire asking about it. Obviously, the people who did not know there had been an inspection were not able to answer our questions about how the inspection had gone.

What should inspectors do?

Whether or not they knew about the inspection itself, we asked whether children had any ideas for us about what inspectors should actually do when they visit, in order to find out whether children are safe and being looked after properly. Altogether, ideas were sent in by 42 children. The top suggestion, which came from 10 children, was that **the inspector should check that the place is suitable for the children to live in**. The word 'homely' was often used as one way to describe what a suitable place would feel like. The next two ideas came from around one in five of the children who sent ideas in. These were that **the inspector should always speak to all the children to ask them about living there** (nine children), and that **the inspector should watch how staff and children get on with each other** (eight children).

Some other ideas, from a few children each, included checking food, checking all the accommodation and the garden, checking written notes and files, checking that children's basic rights are being met, and asking staff about their experiences. Two children said that inspectors should check on the use of restraint of children.

These quotes sum up well what the children thought inspectors should do.

'Talk to people, check paperwork, check rooms to make sure they're safe and give points on how they can do things better. I think they should also try and talk to the kids to see if we are OK with where we live'

'Ask the young people how we are getting on. What is the atmosphere like in the house? Do you get on with the staff? Do you get on with the other young people? Do you have hot water? Do you feel the house is safe? Do you live in a clean house? Do you get food when you are hungry – do you feel that the rules in the house are fair?'

'Ask children lots of questions. Watch how the staff are with the children'

Before the inspection

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We asked a series of questions of the 149 children who told us they had known about the inspection happening. These were to find out their experience of inspections.

First, we asked whether the children had been told about the inspection before it started. Out of the 145 children who answered this question, **78% told us they had been told about the inspection before it happened, and 22% that they hadn't been told until the inspectors arrived.**

Next, we asked whether the children had been asked to do anything special to get things ready for the inspectors. We had answers to this from 144 children, and just over a quarter said they had been asked to prepare for the inspectors. A total of **74% said they had not been asked to do anything to get ready for the inspectors, and 26% said they had been asked to prepare for the inspectors coming.**

Twenty-seven children gave us examples of what they had been asked to do to prepare for inspectors coming. The most usual (which came from 19 of these 27 children) was that **they were asked to tidy things up before the inspectors came.** Nine children said they had been **told to behave themselves well** while the inspectors were around. **Four of the 27 children said they had been told they had to tell the inspectors good things about the place they were living in.**

One child wrote that they were asked to 'clean rooms and be really tidy and polite for this one occasion. New sinks in the bathrooms and new soaps and paper towels when there were not any'. Another said, 'We were asked to be tidy, nice and polite to all the inspectors. Not to moan about anything and be good and easy because staff were under a lot of stress with the inspections', while another reassured us that they were just asked to 'do as what we normally do (I mean the routine in the house). Keep our room tidy and clean as we normally have to'.

Taking part in the inspection

We asked a series of questions about the children's own experience of the inspection, and about what part they had played in it.

First, we asked how many children had been asked for their opinions by an inspector in a group with other children, and 144 answered this question. **Around half these children (51%) told us that an inspector had asked them for their views as part of a group of children.** We also asked how many children had talked to an inspector alone. Out of 143 children who answered this question, **73% said they had talked to an inspector on their own.** Then we asked about questionnaires which asked for their opinions, and just over **50% of the 143 children who answered that question told us they had filled in a questionnaire for the inspector.**

Forty-nine children who had met an inspector in a group with other children told us how the discussion had gone. Twenty told us that the inspector had asked them for their opinions on particular things, like whether they liked the food, or whether they thought there was enough privacy. Twelve said inspectors had asked children to tell them generally whether they liked or disliked the home or school they were living in. Six of the 49 children said they had been asked what they thought of the staff who were looking after them.

Examples of what children told us inspectors had asked them were: 'she asked how it was to live here and whether I liked it and if it was a good home'; 'he asked us if the staff were OK with us, and if we liked staying here, and did we feel safe'.

Two children told us the inspector had given the children their own views. One of the children explained that 'she talked to all of us and we gave her our point of view and she gave hers'.

Thirty of the children who had talked with an inspector on their own told us more about their one-to-one interviews. Eight said the discussion had been about what it was like to live in the home or school. Five out of the 30 were asked if they had any concerns about the home or school, and five said they were asked about their feelings – like whether they were happy there. **Two children said that although the inspector was speaking with them without other children present, their carer or the manager of the home was with them while the inspector was asking them for their views about the home.** One child said they had found it scary to be interviewed on their own by an inspector.

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Fifty-four children told us what they had thought of the questionnaire inspectors had asked them to fill in as part of the inspection. **Thirty of these 54 children said they thought the inspection questionnaire had been 'good' or 'OK'**. Here are two examples of what these children told us: 'I thought it was very useful and worth doing'; 'it was easy and didn't interfere too much with our private lives'.

Out of the 54 children, six found the questionnaire difficult to answer, and another six said they found it boring or annoying. Some had mixed views about it: 'I found some of it a bit irrelevant and some of it really useful.'

A small number of children were worried that the staff looking after them would read what they had written for the inspectors, and so weren't sure that they could tell the inspectors everything they wanted to say. **Four children told us that staff had read what they said about the home or school on their questionnaires, which had their names on.**

Others weren't sure whether or not staff were going to read what they had written to the inspectors, so were careful not to write anything staff might not like. As one of these explained to us: 'I thought that it was a good idea as many of us answered truthfully, although some people say that house parents and staff looked at the answers we had entered and some people didn't think about the questions, they just answered nicely.'

Four other children told us they had to put their names on the questionnaires and because staff read what children said about the home or school, not all of them were honest.

Our last question in this part of the survey was to ask children if they had taken part in the inspection in any other way than meeting an inspector in a group or on their own, or filling in a questionnaire. We didn't give them any suggested answers, and here is the complete list of answers, with how many children gave us each one.

- Talked informally to an inspector: 14 children.
- Took an inspector around the house: 10 children.
- Made refreshments for an inspector: four children.
- Had a meal with an inspector: four children.
- Was observed by an inspector: one child.

In answering this question, some children told us why they hadn't taken part in the inspection. Three children said they couldn't give their views as they were in school classes when the inspectors visited. **Two others said they had not been allowed to speak to an inspector:** 'I didn't take part in the inspection. I wanted to be able to talk to the inspector but I was told I wasn't very reliable.' Two more said they had not wanted to take part in the inspection: 'I was in but chose not to speak to the inspector.'

Some told us more about **meeting inspectors but not talking to them about their views of the home or school:** 'I made her a cup of tea'; 'I did not take part, he was too busy doing paperwork.'

A few children told us that **they had helped with the inspection by helping the inspectors to be impressed by the home or school.** Two said they had been asked to tidy and clean the house before the inspectors arrived: 'I helped to decorate and clean the home so it looked nice.' Three said they had tried to behave well and be polite to the inspectors: 'I helped her pack away her stuff and she thanked me and I was very polite and kind to her and I treated the inspector with respect.'

A few more described how they had each been **involved in a number of different ways in the inspection:** 'I answered the questionnaire and I talked to the inspector and showed him around the boarding house'; 'showed him our bedrooms; he had tea with us and he sat with us when we had quiet time and chatted to us'.

About inspectors

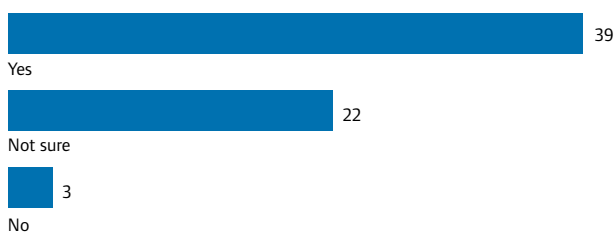
This section of the report says what children told us about inspectors themselves. Of course, only those children who had met with inspectors were able to answer the questions in this section.

We asked the children whether or not they were able to get their views across to an inspector during the inspection. **Three quarters of the children (48 out of the 64 who answered this question) said yes, they were able to get their views across to an inspector during the inspection.**

We also wanted to know whether children thought the inspectors were good at listening to children's views. **Over eight out of 10 children (54 out of the 65 who answered this question) told us inspectors were good at listening to children's views.**

In our past consultations, children have told us that they want inspectors to take as much notice of what children tell them as what staff tell them. We asked the children in this survey about this. Figure 3 gives the answer.

Figure 3: Numbers of children answering the question 'Do you think the inspectors took what children or young people said as seriously as what staff or carers said?'

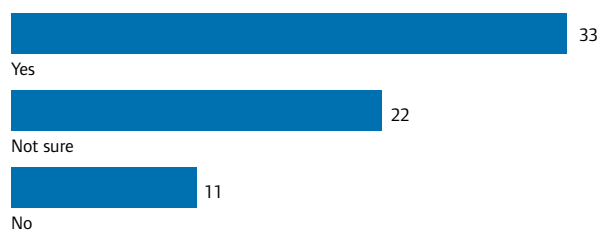


Based on answers from 64 children.

Clearly, from their recent experience of speaking to inspectors, **many of the children in our survey thought the inspectors they had met did take what children or young people said as seriously as what staff or carers said**, and only three children thought they didn't. Even so, **over a third of the children weren't sure whether or not their inspectors took what children said as seriously as what they heard from staff or carers.**

As well as asking whether children could get their views listened to and taken seriously by inspectors, we wanted to know whether children thought inspectors had actually understood what it was really like to be a child living in their home or school. Figure 4 gives their answers on this.

Figure 4: Numbers of children answering the question 'Do you think the inspectors did understand what it is like living here?'



Based on answers from 66 children.

From these answers, it is clear that **half the children thought that inspectors had found out what it was like being a child or young person living in their home or school.** However, of the 66 who answered, 11 thought they didn't understand this, and the remaining 22 weren't sure whether or not the inspectors understood.

What changed after the inspection?

Next we asked the children whether anything had changed straight away because of the inspection. That is, whether the inspection had immediately made a difference to things at their home or school.

Under a quarter of the children (14 out of the 65 who answered this question) told us the inspection had changed something straight away at their home or school, and the rest (51 out of the 65) said it had not changed anything. It is important to say that things are not supposed to change after an inspection unless the inspectors find something wrong. Inspectors can find that everything is happening as it should, and they often find that a school or home is 'outstanding'. So what we learned from the children's answers to this question is not whether the inspector thought things should change, but how many children found that an inspection caused something to change.

We asked the 14 children who said something had changed just after an inspection to tell us what this change had been. There was no one sort of change, and each person told us about a different change happening. Here are some examples of the changes we were told about.

- We got bedroom keys.
- We have extra support when there is an incident.
- New fire doors.
- We had to eat more fruit and veg.
- Food went in the cupboards.
- Energy-saving bulbs.

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What should inspectors do differently next time?

In our last survey question we asked the children whether there was anything they thought inspectors should do differently next time they visited. Seventy-five children answered this question, and **a third of them said there was nothing they thought inspectors should do differently in the future.**

Here were the top three suggestions for changes children thought inspectors should make in future inspections (with how many children made each suggestion).

- Spend more time talking to children and young people: nine children.
- Be more friendly and approachable for children: five children.
- Ask more children to get a wider range of opinions: five children.

Some other suggestions were made by just one or two children. These included giving the children more information about what inspectors were doing and why, and different views on whether inspectors should give notice before they come. One child said inspectors should let children know beforehand that they were going to visit, and another said that all inspections should be unannounced. One child wrote that inspectors should gather children's views anonymously, and another wrote that it was important that inspectors come back to follow things up after the inspection.

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