

Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

This document outlines the framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements to protect children, including the effectiveness of early identification and help for children, young people, their families and carers.

These inspections will focus on the effectiveness of the local authority's child protection services, and the local authority's leadership of strategic partners in their shared work to help and protect children and young people who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

1. This document sets out the framework for the inspection of arrangements for the protection of children.
2. The local authority is the lead agency for child protection. These inspections will consider how effectively the local authority leads partnership working, and how effectively local services contribute to the protection of children and young people.
3. Child protection does not begin at the point of referral to children's social care. Early identification and early help are firmly within the scope of the inspection of child protection services. A key part of the inspection framework will be considering the effectiveness of these services in identifying children and young people who may be at risk, and the degree to which agencies work together to identify problems and offer effective help early, without the need for a formal referral to social care.
4. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) will carry out the inspections under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) retains the power to carry out inspections of other local authority children's services functions if he deems it appropriate.
5. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), the Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (with, where appropriate, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons) have agreed in principle to develop a joint framework for a multi-agency inspection of services for the protection of children in local authority areas. They expect to implement this during 2013/14.

This framework remains subject to periodic review, but continues to apply until such a multi-inspectorate is in place, or otherwise until further notice.

Inspections of arrangements for the protection of children

Frequency of inspection

6. It is unlikely that all local authorities will be inspected under this framework, as a multi-inspectorate framework for the inspection of child protection services is expected to be in place during 2013/14.¹

¹ See paragraph 5.

7. The selection of local authorities for inspection will take account of: previous inspection outcomes; information from other sources, such as whistleblowing referrals, complaints, and serious case reviews; and any other relevant information.

Notice period

8. All inspections will be unannounced. The local authority will be notified on day one of the inspection (normally a Monday) that the lead inspector will be arriving on site that day to begin the inspection. The local authority will be asked to prepare the list of information included in Annex A.
9. Two further inspectors will arrive on site on day two to focus initially on one particular part of the child's journey: the point at which the child is referred to children's social care because they are believed to be at risk of, or actually suffering, harm.

During this first part of the inspection, inspectors will evaluate: the timeliness and management of referrals; the effectiveness of assessment and risk management; the provision of immediate help where required; the extent of focus on the child or young person's needs; and the effectiveness of multi-agency work at the point of, and immediately following, referral.²

10. On day two of the inspection, the lead inspector will spend time planning the remainder of the inspection with the local authority. This way, we retain the benefits of an unannounced inspection, but local authorities have the opportunity to plan with the inspection team.
11. The remainder of the inspection will focus on all other aspects of the child's journey. At this point, the size of the inspection team will increase to reflect this.
12. The full inspection will be contained within a two-week period.
13. Inspections will not normally be deferred because of staff absence or staff shortages in the local authority.

Inspection team

14. Normally, five suitably experienced HMI will carry out the inspection. Four will be experienced in social care and the inspection of social care; one will be experienced in the inspection of educational provision. An additional inspector may be added to the team, taking account of previous inspection findings or the size of the local authority being inspected.

² To plan inspections, Ofsted will maintain a list of the number and location of office addresses where arrangements for dealing with contacts, referrals and assessments are undertaken. One or more of these sites will be the focus of the first two days of fieldwork.

15. The lead inspector will be on site from day one (Monday); three inspectors will be on site on day two (Tuesday) and they will be joined by a further two inspectors on day three (Wednesday) for the remainder of the inspection.

Scope of inspection

16. The inspection will consider key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered.
17. The inspection will focus on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements: for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It will also consider the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.

This includes:

- those children and young people identified by other services – such as adult social care, schools, police, health services and children's centres – as at risk of harm, but who have not yet reached the significant harm threshold (the threshold of 'suffering or likely to suffer significant harm'), and for whom a preventative service would reduce the likelihood of that risk or harm escalating
 - those children and young people referred to the local authority, including: those where urgent action has to be taken to protect them; those subject to further assessment; and those subject to child protection enquiries³
 - those who become the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan that sets out the help that will be provided to them and their families to keep them safe and to promote their welfare
 - those children and young people who are receiving social work services from the local authority where there are significant levels of concern about their safety and welfare, but these have not reached the significant harm threshold
 - those children and young people who have been assessed as no longer needing a child protection plan, but who may have continuing needs for help and support.
18. The inspection will focus on the child's journey from needing to receiving help. However, each individual child's journey is different and will have different end points. For some children, it will end with the provision of effective early help, which means that there is no need for the journey to continue into the formal child protection system. Some will be referred to child protection services; some

³ The Children Act 1989, section 47; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

will become the subject of child protection plans; some will require long-term help to ensure that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted, including the possibility of removal from home and placement with a new family. Some children's journeys take them in and out of the child protection system at different points. For all children and young people, of course, the child protection journey is only part of the ongoing journey towards adulthood.

19. The inspection will focus on the child's journey through intensive and extensive case sampling and case tracking.
20. At every stage of the child's journey, inspectors will evaluate:
 - the quality, effectiveness and timeliness of assessment and risk management
 - the effectiveness and impact of the help given to children, young people and their families
 - the consistency of the focus on the child or young person's needs and best interests
 - the quality and effectiveness of inter-agency working and help for children, young people and families, including the interface with adult social care
 - the extent to which social workers and other professionals working with the child or young person and their family have meaningful, consistent and direct contact with them
 - the effectiveness of quality assurance and management oversight of practice and decision making
 - the experiences of particularly vulnerable children and young people, such as: privately fostered children; children who live in households where there is domestic abuse, substance misuse and/or at least one parent or carer has mental ill health; and children not receiving full-time education
 - how well the local authority takes account of the wishes and feelings of children and young people, and the extent to which this informs every aspect of their care.
21. Inspectors will identify and highlight good practice.
22. Inspectors will pay attention to whether services are accessible to everyone and that there is equality of opportunity and outcomes, irrespective of age, religion, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, marital status and sexual orientation.

Evaluation schedule for inspection

23. The evaluation schedule is set out in *Inspections of arrangements for the protection of children*, which outlines the main aspects of the service and outcomes against which inspectors will make judgements. This document also outlines the grade descriptors that inspectors will use in arriving at their judgements.

Summary evaluation schedule for the child protection inspection

24. The evaluation schedule for the child protection inspection can be summarised as:
- overall effectiveness, including areas for development
 - the effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, and their families and carers
 - the quality of practice
 - leadership and governance.

Grading inspection findings

25. Inspectors will make judgements against the evaluation schedules using a four-point scale:

Outstanding	a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good	a service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate	a service that meets minimum requirements
Inadequate	a service that does not meet minimum requirements.

On site

Day one

26. On day one, the lead inspector will arrive at a selected contact, referral and assessment site. They will notify the most senior manager available at the site immediately before they arrive. On arrival, the lead inspector will explain that the inspection will be carried out in a way that will seek to minimise disruption to the service.
27. The lead inspector will request the information outlined in Annex A and begin the inspection. Any additional information provided for the inspection, in addition to that set out in Annex A, will be at the local authority's discretion,

with a clear indication of its relevance to the inspection. Inspectors do not require the production of additional information specifically for the inspection. They will rely on the management information that is used routinely to inform managers about the activity and effectiveness of the work of the service.

Planning meeting with the Director of Children's Services

28. At the earliest possible opportunity, the lead inspector will meet with the Director of Children's Services or their representative to plan the remainder of the inspection. The purpose of the meeting is to:
 - provide further information about the scope of the inspection
 - agree practical arrangements – such as shadowing social work staff, observing multi-agency meetings and arrangements for scrutiny of case files with appropriate workers – and provide other clarification as necessary
 - provide an opportunity for inspectors to discuss any issues or concerns that have arisen from the pre-inspection reading
 - discuss how children, young people and their families can be directly engaged in the inspection.
29. The inspection team will maintain regular contact with each other to review evidence and to secure judgements.
30. Daily discussions between the lead inspector and the Director of Children's Services, or their representative, form an essential part of the inspection. These 'keeping in touch' meetings provide the opportunity to discuss the progress of the inspection and to share and seek responses to emerging findings.
31. The team will hold a final meeting on the last day of fieldwork (day eight – normally the Wednesday of the second week) to secure their judgements and agree gradings. The Director of Children's Services will be invited to join this meeting. The judgements and gradings will be subject to scrutiny and challenge by the quality assurance manager.
32. If any unresolved issues of significant risk of harm to a child or young person are identified during the inspection, inspectors will immediately inform the relevant senior manager and confirm this in writing at the earliest opportunity.

Inspection activity

33. Inspections will focus on direct practice by:
 - scrutinising and discussing a sample of children's cases that reflect all the stages of a child's journey alongside social work staff and, where appropriate, other professionals working with the child or young person
 - meeting, as appropriate, with children, young people, parents and carers who are the subject of a sub-set of the cases sampled

- shadowing staff in their day to day work, for example observing work in the duty team, the work of social workers with children and families, and the work of independent reviewing officers
- observing practice in multi-agency meetings such as strategy meetings, child protection conferences, resource panels.

Documentation for the inspection

34. Inspectors will have access to information already held by Ofsted before the inspection, such as:

- findings from other relevant Ofsted inspections and regulatory activity
- relevant nationally collected data
- the findings of any serious case reviews undertaken, and the outcome of Ofsted's evaluation of any such reviews
- evidence from the Ofsted whistleblowing hotline
- a summary of substantiated complaints made to Ofsted about the local authority and its partners that relate to child protection
- other related published documentation, such as the published Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) annual report.

35. On day one of the inspection, the lead inspector will also invite the local authority to supply the information set out in Annex A and the most recent locally collected data that is considered relevant to inform the inspection.

This should include any self-evaluation material that is available or any annual performance reports that have been collated for the Chief Executive, leader of the council and Lead Member for Children's Services, in connection with the functioning of the LSCB or wider services for the help and protection of children and young people. The local authority will be expected to be explicit about what it believes to be the relevance of other material provided.

36. During the inspection, inspectors will need access to the performance information that managers routinely use on: the activity and effectiveness of professional practice; the impact of help and protection; and the feedback that is provided by children, young people and families about the quality of the service and the difference that it has made.

Views of children, young people, parents and carers

37. As well as listening directly to children, young people and their families, inspectors will take into account any available evidence held by the local authority that demonstrates how the views of children, young people and families or carers have been taken into account in the evaluation, development and design of early intervention and child protection services.

Tracking individual children's experiences

38. Inspectors will examine case files, wherever possible, with social workers or other key workers who are available at the time of the inspection. The samples will be selected at random from both current cases and cases that have been closed in the previous three months. However, this will be adjusted to ensure a balance of:

- age, gender, disability and ethnicity
- practitioner and team.

Inspectors may ask for samples of further cases at any point in the inspection to follow up particular lines of inquiry, for example issues around the interface with adult social care or substance misuse services.

39. In addition to this sample, the local authority will be asked to identify three cases that demonstrate local good practice.
40. In a sub-set of the sample, inspectors will seek to meet with children, young people, parents and carers, as appropriate, to seek their views of the effectiveness of the help provided.
41. During the early part of the inspection, the inspectors will focus on the point at which the child or young person is referred to children's social care. At the meeting with the Director of Children's Services, the lead inspector will explain how inspectors will identify and analyse case records with, and alongside, key professionals who have oversight of the decision-making process throughout all stages of the child's journey.
42. Case file scrutiny and discussion will consider:
- the extent to which children and young people who may be at risk of, or who are already suffering, harm are identified, assessed and provided with appropriate help and protection
 - the effectiveness of the help given to children and young people at risk and their families at all stages of their journey: at the point where concerns are first raised; at referral to social care services; through risk assessment, assessment, planning, intervention and review; and, where appropriate, exit from the child protection system

- the quality of practice, supervision and the focus on the needs of the child or young person
- the quality of planning, management oversight and clear decision making in respect of the needs of children and young people
- the extent to which agencies and professionals work together to help and protect children and young people, including the effectiveness of information sharing.

43. In most instances, case file analysis will consist of the following key elements.

- At least 50 cases will be selected by inspectors. Where available, managers and key workers will be invited to assist inspectors in their analysis of the selected cases.⁴
- In a sub-set of the sample, inspectors will seek to meet with children, young people, parents and carers, as appropriate, to seek their views of the effectiveness of the help provided.
- Any case file audit activity undertaken by the local authority will be scrutinised and evaluated.

Reporting findings

44. A single report will follow each inspection. The report will set out the inspection findings using text and grades, organised under the headings below.

Report contents

Overall effectiveness	Grade
Areas for improvement	No grade
About this inspection	Information about the inspection
Service information	Brief contextual information about the services provided in the area
The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, and their families and carers	Grade
The quality of practice	Grade
Leadership and governance	Grade

45. The draft report will normally be sent within 10 working days of the end of the inspection to the Director of Children's Services for a factual accuracy check.

⁴ Further details will be published on the Ofsted website by March 2012.

46. The Director of Children's Services or their representatives will return the draft report with any comments on factual accuracy within five days (15 working days after the end of the inspection).
47. Following this, the final report setting out the inspection findings will be sent to the Director of Children's Services within 20 working days of the end of the inspection, copied to the Lead Member for Children's Services, the Chair of the LSCB and the Chief Executive of the local authority.
48. The final report will be published on the Ofsted website within 22 days of the end of the inspection.

Communication and feedback

49. Inspectors will provide regular opportunities for dialogue and feedback during the inspection. Should any unresolved issues of significant risk of harm to a child be identified during the inspection, inspectors will immediately inform the Director of Children's Services and confirm this in writing at the earliest opportunity. It is expected that any significant risk will be addressed immediately by those responsible.
50. Oral feedback about headline findings will normally be given to the Director of Children's Services and such others as, in discussion with lead inspector, she or he chooses to invite, before the inspectors leave at the end of the inspection. This may include, for example, the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Lead Member for Children's Services, and other key partners. In the absence of the Director of Children's Services, feedback will be provided to the most senior manager who is available.

Confidentiality

51. Ofsted will take all appropriate steps to ensure that information provided to inspectors remains confidential, as required by statute. However, evidence gathered during inspections may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, although the identity of named individuals will not be disclosed. Where Ofsted considers that any information provided by children indicates the likelihood of harm, the necessary information will be passed to the local authority's child protection staff for action.

Quality assurance

52. Quality assurance is the action taken to ensure that an inspection is of the quality needed and expected by users, providers and Ofsted. As part of this, inspectors will be suitably experienced in the areas they are inspecting and quality assurance managers will be suitably experienced and skilled to undertake this aspect of work.

53. All inspectors are expected to undertake quality assurance of their own and other inspectors' work during inspections. The lead inspector has overall responsibility for ensuring that all the evidence gathered is robust, reliable and secure. Therefore, all judgements reached by the inspection team will be fully supported by the available evidence.
54. For national consistency, some inspections will be visited by an inspector from Ofsted to support the quality assurance processes undertaken by the inspection team. During these visits, the visiting inspector will speak to the lead inspector, inspection team members, managers and other staff, and, where possible, users and other stakeholders. They will also attend any inspection team meetings taking place during their visit. This inspector will always seek views from the local authority and/or partners on the conduct of the inspection, and sample the way that evidence is being gathered and used.
55. Ofsted will ask the local authority to complete a short evaluation form following each inspection, which will be used to improve the quality of inspections.
56. All inspection reports will be subject to quality assurance procedures, which include a central consistency check and moderation of the draft and final reports against the evidence and evaluation schedule, and clearance of the report and judgements by a senior manager.

Conduct during the inspection

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

- respond appropriately to reasonable requests
- take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues.

Expectations of providers

58. So that inspection and regulation are productive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a professional working environment based on courtesy and professional behaviour. Inspectors are expected to uphold the code of conduct, but Ofsted also expects providers to:
- be courteous and professional
 - apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with inspectors
 - enable inspectors to conduct their visit in an open and honest way
 - enable inspectors to evaluate the provision objectively against the standards/framework
 - provide evidence that will enable the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision
 - work with inspectors to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
 - ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on their premises
 - maintain a purposeful dialogue with the inspector or the inspection team
 - draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors promptly and in a suitable manner
 - respect that inspectors will need to observe practice and talk to staff and users without the presence of a manager or registered person.

Complaints

59. The great majority of our work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns do arise during an inspection, they should be raised with the lead inspector immediately so that they can be resolved while the inspection is taking place. Any concerns about the factual accuracy of the findings in the report may be raised with the inspector after the inspection. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a formal complaint may be lodged.
60. Normally, a complaint can be made at any stage during an inspection or up to 30 calendar days from the date of publication of any report or letter. Lodging a complaint will not normally delay publication of the report.
61. All complaints will be initially assessed by a designated Ofsted representative and early contact will be made in order to resolve any complaints without delay. Where this is not possible, complaints will be investigated in accordance with

Ofsted's published complaints procedure. The complaints procedure, which sets out how providers or users can complain about their inspection and what will happen to their complaint, is available at:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070080.

62. Complaints should be made in writing (including by email to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) to:

Sue Aldridge, Principal Officer, Complaints
Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Further information

63. We hope that you find this document useful in helping you prepare for your inspection. If you have any queries about your inspection, please discuss them with your lead inspector when they contact you.
64. If you have any other general queries about the inspections of local authority arrangements for the protection of children, please contact Lisa Pascoe on 0300 123 1231 or lisa.pascoe@ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A. Identifying children and young people to include in the sample

On day one of the inspection, the lead inspector will ask the local authority to compile child-level data from their internal electronic records. These data will then be used to choose a sample of cases for the inspectors to track.

The local authority should provide information on the groups of children and young people listed below. Data is only to be provided where it is applicable, for example, not all contact records will have all the data listed under 'Child details' so only what has been recorded is required. The specific data required for each child, where available, is stated below in brackets relating to Table 1:

- all those who have been the subject of a contact in the three months prior to inspection (sections 1 and 2)
- all those who have been the subject of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), or an equivalent assessment, in the three months prior to inspection (sections 1 and 3)
- all those who have been the subject of a referral in the three months prior to inspection (sections 1 and 5)
- all those in receipt of services as a child in need at the point of inspection (sections 1, 4 and 7)
- all those subject to a child protection plan at the point of inspection (sections 1, 4 and 6)
- all those who have ceased to receive support, either as a child in need or as a child subject to a child protection plan, in the three months prior to inspection (sections 1, 6 and 7).

Table 1. Details on the data required

Section	Subject	Fields
1	Child details	Child Unique ID Gender Ethnicity Date of birth Legal status (if any) Details of any disability
2	Contacts	Contact date Contact source
3	CAF or equivalent assessment	CAF/Other completion date Organisation completing
4	Case allocation details	Allocated team Allocated worker Case unallocated (Yes or No)

5	Referrals	Referral date Referral source Type of referral (S47 or S17) Re-referral (Yes or No)
6	Child protection	Date of initial child protection conference Date became subject of a child protection plan Date ceased to be subject of a child protection plan Subject to emergency protection/care or supervision order/protected under police powers in last six months (Yes or No)
7	Children in receipt of services under section 17 (child in need)	Date services commenced Date services ceased

Ideally, these data would be provided in a single spreadsheet. You can find an example spreadsheet on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20120004.

However, we appreciate that this is not always the easiest option for local authorities. Some of the required data – particularly in relation to ‘Contacts’ and ‘CAF or equivalent assessments’ – are not necessarily recorded on the main ICT systems. The local authority’s preferred way to provide the data might be a series of spreadsheets. The local authority is free to use the solution that suits it best and enables it to provide the data in the timeframe requested. Whatever the format, the data should be clearly identifiable.

Additional, locally held, information required for the inspection

The lead inspector will also ask for:

- the local authority children’s services organisational structure, including: lines of accountability; case management and workflow arrangements; protocols for transfer of cases between different teams; and the number of cases awaiting transfer
- evidence of the impact and analysis of CAF or equivalent assessment activity over the last 12 months
- any other analysis of data in relation to the early help, identification and protection of children
- copies of any quality assurance activity, multi-agency and single agency case audits over the six months prior to inspection, and action plans in relation to early help, identification and protection of children
- details of agreed threshold criteria for child protection services
- arrangements to safeguard the welfare of privately fostered children and numbers of privately fostered children known to the authority

- a workforce profile of social work staff working with children in need and children subject to child protection plans at the point of inspection (This includes: the number of qualified social workers and their relevant experience; the number of vacancies for permanent staff; the number of locum/agency staff; the extent of staff turnover/stability and sickness levels; and average caseloads of staff.)
- evidence to demonstrate how feedback from children, young people, families, and front-line staff both individually and collectively, is asked for, is taken into account and, where appropriate, impacts on practice, strategy, service development and design
- evidence to demonstrate how the outcomes of complaints have contributed to improvement in help and protection
- minutes of the last three LSCB meetings
- evidence of LSCB multi-agency training and its impact
- a list of children and young people (for whom the local authority is responsible) who are in any form of Alternative Educational Provision, other than at a registered Pupil Referral Unit, with the date of placement of the child and the amount of education/training received by the child
- the local strategic needs analysis, and shared local strategy to address this, in relation to early help and the protection of children, including, for example, numbers of children living in homes where there is known substance misuse, mental ill health of a parent/carer and/or domestic violence
- details of multi-agency meetings during the fieldwork period, such as initial and review child protection conferences, core groups and any planned strategy meetings. The lead inspector will indicate the geographical areas to be covered. This will be reviewed on a regular basis between the lead inspector and the local authority.