

What children said about how adoption support agencies should be inspected in future

A report on what children and young people told us about our ideas for changing the way we inspect adoption support agencies in the future.

You can find out more on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk and the children's rights website www.rights4me.org.

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Who we are

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. We are the people who inspect schools and services that care for children and young people, including all adoption support agencies.

We do our inspections to check how good services are for children and young people, and also for the adults who use them too. When we inspect adoption support agencies, our inspectors talk with staff, children and young people.

We are separate from the government, but we do tell the government how we think services for children are doing.

What is an adoption support agency?

An adoption support agency helps adopted children and young people, as well as adults who are adopted. They can give advice, help with a particular problem, give counselling or help people to find out details about their adoptions.

The help and support can last for a short or long time – it depends on what is needed. Sometimes adoption support agencies help children and young people to get ready for adoption.

As well as this, adoption support agencies can help adoptive families and birth relatives. They can help anyone who has been involved in an adoption.

Before an agency can give help like this, it has to be registered with us to become an adoption support agency.

What this report is about

We are working on some changes to the way we inspect adoption support agencies. We are also thinking about how we decide how well an adoption support agency is doing its job. We call the documents that say all this our 'framework' for inspecting adoption support agencies.

We asked children and young people to tell us what they thought about our ideas for changing the way we inspect adoption support agencies. We did this using an online questionnaire. Some people sent in their answers on paper. We have counted their responses along with all those who sent in their answers through the web.

Altogether, 31 children and young people answered our survey. Nine of these said they had received help from an adoption support agency and 19 said they had not, with three not answering this question. This report tells you what they all said. Where a number of people said the same sort of thing, we have given quotes of what a child or young person said that sums it up.

It also gives a short summary of what adults said about our ideas too. Then it says what we are going to do next.

What children and young people said about each of the questions we asked them

1. Is it important for children, young people and adults who use adoption support agencies to be able to tell Ofsted what they think about their agency whenever they want to, not just when an inspection is happening?

Twenty-four children and young people told us that it is really important and three told us that it is quite important for children and young people to be able to tell Ofsted what they think about their agency whenever they want.

Here are some of the reasons they gave for saying this is important.

'Everything changes constantly. If there is a problem, it needs to be reported and sorted out.'

'I don't think young people's views are listened to.'

2. Is 10 days before an inspection the right amount of time to tell an adoption support agency they are going to be inspected?

Eleven children and young people thought 10 days before was the right length of time to tell agencies they were going to be inspected. However, nine thought that they should receive no notice at all. Also, seven children and young people thought we should tell them more than 10 days before and three thought we should tell them less than 10 days before.

Here are some of the things children and young people said on this question.

By children who wanted no notice: 'So that they have no time to prepare themselves and it will also give Ofsted a true understanding.'

By children who agreed with 10 days: 'It's just the right amount of time.'

By children who wanted more than 10 days: 'So they can get all of the paperwork and tidy things up.'

3. Should inspectors check on whether the help the agency has given was really what the children, young people and adults wanted?

Twenty-eight of the 31 children and young people who answered said yes to this question.

We then asked children and young people whether they agreed with some of the other things we want to look at on inspections. You can see the answers in this table:

Question	Yes	No	Not sure
Should we look at whether children and young people have a say in deciding what sort of adoption support might help them?	26	0	4
Should we ask whether children and young people are happy with the help they get from their agency?	27	0	4
Should we ask whether the agency is meeting children's and young people's needs?	28	0	0
Should we check how many adoption placements break down?	25	4	2
Should we check that if placements do break down, the agency helps the children, young people and their adoptive families?	29	2	0

4. Should inspectors decide how good they think the agency is at helping children and young people?

Twenty-five of the 31 children and young people who answered this question said yes, two said no and four were not sure.

We then asked whether they agreed with some of the things we will look for to help us decide how good the agency is at helping children and young people. You can see the answers in this table:

Question	Yes	No	Not sure
Should we check that the agency's staff know a lot about adoption?	27	0	4
Should we check that the agency's staff know how well adoption is working out for children and young people?	24	3	4
Should we check that the agency's staff make sure they	26	1	4

treat everyone as an individual?			
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Here are some of the things children and young people said on this question.

'The staff should know what they are doing.'

'Are the agency staff aware of issues relating to attachment?'

5. Should inspectors decide how safe they think the children and young people are while the agency is helping them?

Twenty-five of the 31 children and young people said yes to this question, while the other six were not sure.

We then asked whether they agreed with some of the things we want to look for to help us decide how safe children and young people are. You can see the answers in this table:

Question	Yes	No	Not sure
Should we look at whether the agency is doing proper checks on its staff before they start working for the agency?	28	1	2
Should we check that the agency tells adopters how children and young people may feel if they were hurt by their birth family?	24	2	5
Should we check that children and young people can get advice from the agency if they want it?	27	1	3
Should we check that if anyone says they have been hurt the agency deals with it quickly	27	0	2

and properly?			
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6. Should inspectors decide how well they think the agency is managed?

Out of the 30 children and young people who answered this question, 24 said yes, four said no and two were not sure.

We then asked children and young people whether they agreed with some of the things we want to help us decide how well the agency is managed. This table shows what they answered:

Question	Yes	No	Not sure
Should we look at how the people who manage the agency check what is going on and that it follows the law?	26	1	4
Should we look at how the people who manage the agency check that children and young people are being properly helped by the agency?	28	1	2
Should we check that the agency listens to the views of children and young people?	28	0	2
Should we check how the agency trains its staff?	25	3	2
Should we check how the agency is always making sure it gets better at its job?	27	2	2

7. Is there anything else you think inspectors should check up on when they inspect an adoption support agency? Or anything you think inspectors shouldn't check up on?

Most children and young people did not suggest anything else for us to check on, and no-one suggested anything we should not look at.

Some suggestions for things we could look at were:

'... how well the child's school is going.'

'Just make sure that the child is well supported, looked after and safe.'

'That staff are kept fully trained.'

Other things children and young people told us

We asked children and young people to tell us anything else they wanted to say about inspecting adoption support agencies. Here are some of the messages about what inspectors should look at:

'Talk to staff individually and make use of group sessions for children.'

'Please listen to young children's views because it is important to know what they think as well.'

What did adults say to us?

Sixty adults answered a separate questionnaire about our plans for inspecting adoption support agencies. Some of the adults were from adoption support agencies, adoption agencies and local authorities; some were parents who had adopted, and some were social workers and other people who work to help children.

Adults liked our new ways of inspecting adoption support agencies and how we want to look at whether agencies are getting better in their work for children and young people as well as for adults. They agreed that we want to judge agencies on the right things when we inspect.

Most adults agreed that it would be useful for both adults and children and young people to be able to tell Ofsted what they think about the agency. Some did say that we would have to make sure everyone understood that we can't look into someone's complaint and then let them know what had happened. We can only take on board what people say about the agency when we are deciding whether the agency is doing its job properly.

Some adults wanted us to tell agencies about their inspection 10 days before it happened, but others wanted us to tell them earlier as they said it would cause problems if inspectors turned up without enough time for the agency to get ready for their visit.

If you would like to know more about what adults said to us, you can look on our website at a different report called *Responses to Ofsted's consultation on the new inspection framework for adoption support agencies*. You can find it at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120187.

What will Ofsted do now?

We carried out some test inspections in June 2012. After these tests, and after listening to your views, we have decided to tell most agencies they are going to be inspected 10 days before the inspection. We think this gives them time to set up meetings with children, young people and adults using the adoption support service. But if the agency is run by just one person working on their own, we will tell them 20 days before so we can make sure they are available during the inspection.

We will publish our new inspection framework (which explains how we are going to inspect adoption support agencies) in August 2012. We will start inspecting in the new way from September 2012. We will visit each agency every three years.

To help us with our inspections, we would like children and young people to tell us what they think about the adoption support agency they use or have used. You will be able to do this online between September 2012 and March 2013 and your comments will come straight to Ofsted. The adoption support agency will be able to give you the internet link to do this and any other information you will need. We will only use your comments when we inspect the agency.

Thank you!

Thank you to all the children and young people who gave us their views. It has been really helpful to know what you think about our plans. These will help us to do our job properly and to check that adoption support agencies help children and young people.