

Serious Incident Notifications from local authority children's services

This release contains:

- Statutory notifications of incidents affecting children, aged under 18 years
- Data for the period between 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015
- These data only reflect the extent of Ofsted's current knowledge about all the details relating to the notifications that were received in the relevant period
- These data are experimental, because the statistics do not yet meet the rigorous quality standards of National Statistics.

Increase in the number of local authorities reporting a serious incident notification.

A total of 117 local authorities reported serious incident notifications to Ofsted between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, an increase of 14% on the number in the previous year (103).

Increase in the overall number of serious incident notifications received by Ofsted.

In 2014-15 there were 385 serious incident notifications received by Ofsted, an increase of 29% on the previous year (298).

Increase in the number of serious case reviews initiated, but a fall in the percentage of notifications resulting in a serious case review.

There were 166 serious case reviews initiated in 2014-15, an increase of 16% from the previous year (143).

The percentage of serious incident notifications resulting in a serious case review fell from 48%, in the year 2013-14, to 43%, in the year 2014-15.

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Key findings

Notifications

When considering the key findings, below, it is important that the reader is aware of the circumstances where local authorities are required to notify Ofsted of serious incidents. Full details of the requirements are included in the Notes section, on p.6 of this release.

From 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, Ofsted received 385¹ serious incident notifications from local authorities, a 29% increase in the number of notifications from the previous year (298).

The number of notifications received during the time period covered in this statistical release does not necessarily equate to the number of incidents which have occurred within that time period. Some notifications relate to incidents which occurred before 1 April 2014, but about which Ofsted was not notified until after 1 April 2014.

The increase in the number of notifications could be as a result of a number of factors, such as the impact of the move of Ofsted social care work to eight regions in England. This has led to increased engagement between Ofsted and local authorities, which may have contributed to a more effective and timely reporting of notifiable incidents by local authorities.

Just under half of the notifications received in the period related to child deaths (190), which was an increase of 17% from the previous year (163). Of all notifications, 195 related to incidents of serious harm, an increase of 44% on the previous year (135).

Although each child death has its own, separate, notification, the overall number of notifications does not equate to the number of children involved in the incidents notified. Notifications involving incidents of serious harm – that is, other than child death – sometimes include information on family or non-related groups. The 195 notifications of serious harm related to 215 children in the year 2014-15. This compares to 135 notifications and 150 children in the previous year 2013-14. The underlying data for these cases, where it relates to the age range of the child, gives the age range of the child who is identified first in the notification.

Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015 Ofsted received serious incident notifications from 117 local authorities, an increase of 14 on the 103 local authorities that reported serious incidents in the previous year.

¹ In total there were 390 serious incident notifications received during this time; however five of these related to incidents that were not directly linked with harm to a particular child, so details from these incidents are not included in this release.

Child deaths

At the time of a notification being made to Ofsted, the local authority may not have had full information about the cause of a child's death. Consequently, the authority may not have been able to provide complete information to Ofsted.

Where further information has been provided to Ofsted by the local authority since the original notification, for example about post-mortem or inquest findings or criminal convictions, Ofsted has used this information to inform the data in the tables below. As stated above, the figures for child deaths do not all relate to deaths which occurred during the period.

Table 1: Priority cause of death for deaths notified to Ofsted between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015

Priority Cause	Number	%
Killing/non-accidental injury by parent or carer	39	20.5
Unknown or unascertained	38	20.0
Dangerous behaviour (incl. substance misuse)	34	17.9
Natural causes (incl. life limiting disability and illness)	31	16.3
Accidents (including possible overlay)	31	16.3
Killing/non-accidental injury by unrelated person	12	6.3
Neglect	5	2.6
Total cause of death	190	100

Child death notifications have been categorised according to the latest information provided to Ofsted by the local authority about what was understood to be the cause of the child's death.

The term 'dangerous behaviour' has been used to signify actions by a child or young person which put them at risk of injury or death, including suspected suicides.

Of the 31 children who were reported as dying from natural causes, 18 were children looked after.

There are some deaths that remain unexplained or where the cause of death is not known. This occurs where, for example, the results of a post-mortem may be inconclusive or where it has not been possible for the agencies investigating the death to fully ascertain the circumstances.

Serious harm

From 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, Ofsted received 195 notifications of incidents of serious harm that did not involve the death of a child. These related to 215 children. In the previous year, 2013-14, Ofsted received 130 notifications which related to 150 children.

At the time of a notification being made to Ofsted, the local authority may not have had full information about the serious incident. Consequently, the authority may not have been able to provide complete information to Ofsted.

Where information has become available subsequent to the notification being made, such as criminal convictions or further information from the local authority, Ofsted has used this information to inform the data in the table below. The table categorises the incidents by numbers of notifications and not numbers of children.

Table 2: Priority cause of serious harm for incidents notified to Ofsted between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015

Priority Cause	Number	%
Sexual abuse/CSE by unrelated person	61	31.3
Non-accidental injury by parent or carer	55	28.2
Neglect by parent or carer	25	12.8
Other (incl. unknown or unascertained)	24	12.3
Sexual abuse by family member	13	6.7
Self-harm/Dangerous behaviour	8	4.1
Non-accidental injury by unrelated person	6	3.1
Accidents	3	1.5
Total cause of serious harm	195	100

Serious case reviews

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in a local authority area has the responsibility for deciding whether a serious incident meets the criteria for instigating a serious case review.

For 166 (43%) of the 385 incidents notified to Ofsted in 2014-15, the relevant LSCB decided to initiate a serious case review. This compares to 143 serious case reviews initiated from 298 notifications in the previous year (48%).

Of the 166 serious case reviews initiated in 2014-15, 90 were initiated in response to the death of a child or young person, compared to 74 initiated in the previous year. The number of serious case reviews that were initiated concerning an incident of serious harm increased from 69 in the year 2013-14, to 76 in 2014-15.

Revisions to previous release

This is the first release of these data for the period 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015.

Notes

Requirement for local authorities to notify Ofsted

Local authorities are required to provide statutory notifications to Ofsted of certain categories of serious incidents affecting children. Until late March 2015, the criteria for these notifications were set out in Local Authority Circular LAC (2007)25.

According to this Local Authority Circular, local authorities were required to notify Ofsted of serious incidents involving children which:

- are serious enough that they may lead to a Serious Case Review, including where a child has sustained a potentially life-threatening injury through abuse or neglect, serious sexual abuse, or sustained serious and permanent impairment of health or development through abuse or neglect; or
- involve a child death and will automatically lead to a Serious Case Review (when a child dies (including death by suicide) and abuse or neglect is known or suspected to be a factor in the child's death); or
- should be brought to the attention of Ofsted and the Government because of concern about professional practice or implications for Government policy; or
- raise issues about a council's professional practice that may need to be considered further in the context of performance assessment; or
- have attracted or are likely to attract media attention.

Local authorities were also required to inform Ofsted of the death of a child looked after and of every case that became the subject of a serious case review.

On 26 March 2015, the Department for Education published amended criteria for serious incident notifications in the revised statutory guidance Working together to safeguard children. The revised guidance states that:

'A notifiable incident is an incident involving the care of a child which meets any of the following criteria:

- a child has died (including cases of suspected suicide), and abuse or neglect is known or suspected;
- a child has been seriously harmed and abuse or neglect is known or suspected

- a looked after child has died (including cases where abuse or neglect is not known or suspected); or
- a child in a regulated setting or service has died (including cases where abuse or neglect is not known or suspected).'

Serious case reviews

The revised statutory guidance also clarified the responsibility of Local Safeguarding Children Boards for informing Ofsted, the Department for Education and the National panel of independent experts on Serious Case Reviews of their decisions regarding initiation of serious case reviews.

Methodology

The data in the release are from serious incident notifications received by Ofsted between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015.

The numbers of notifications received during the time period covered in this statistical release are not, necessarily, the number of incidents which have occurred during 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015.

Some notifications relate to incidents which occurred before 1 April 2014, but about which Ofsted was not notified until after 1 April 2014.

The number of notifications do not equate to the number of children involved in those incidents. Each child death had its own, separate, notification. Those notifications involving incidents other than child death sometimes included family or non-related groups in one notification document. The 195 incidents of serious harm relate to 215 children. The underlying data, where it relates to age band, relate to the child that is referenced first in the document sent to Ofsted.

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