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Ofsted's role

Ofsted cannot directly investigate or intervene in individual cases. However, we will look at any information you share with us along with any other information we have about the service. We will then use this to help us decide how best to inspect or regulate that service.

It's usually best to raise any concerns or complaints directly with the service first, unless you have a good reason not to.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm

If you believe that any child is at immediate risk of harm, contact the children's social care department of the child's local authority or report this to the police. This applies whether they're using local authority or other children's services.

It's always best to report your concern to local agencies.

If you contact Ofsted, we will pass on the information to the relevant local authority.

You can also get advice on reporting child protection risks in ['What to do if you're worried a child is being abused'](#) or further information on keeping children safe in ['Working together to safeguard children'](#).

When Ofsted cannot take action

Individual concerns

We cannot look at individual concerns or grievances that you might have with the social care provider, such as employment matters or contractual disputes. If you have a grievance, you should refer to your organisation's policies.

Services outside Ofsted's remit

We can only take action if you're contacting us about a service that we inspect and/or regulate. We cannot investigate concerns about services:

- in Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland
- that are regulated by other organisations (for example, adult social care is regulated by the [Care Quality Commission](#))

Concerns and complaints

If you have an issue or concern about a children's social care service, you should consider contacting the service first. It's usually the quickest option as they can address your concerns directly: most concerns can be resolved at this stage.

If you're an employee at the organisation you have concerns about, and your employer has a whistleblowing policy, refer to this. Find out [more about whistleblowing](#).

If your concern is not resolved, or you feel you did not receive an adequate response you should follow the organisation's complaints procedure.

[Contact us](#) if:

- you are not satisfied with their response after following the complaints procedure
- you feel unable to contact the provider about this particular issue

It's useful to make notes of any key people involved, dates and times, and to send us copies of any written complaints you have made.

We will do everything we can to keep your identity confidential if you want us to. Find out [more about confidentiality](#).

Situations where we may review your information

We will review your information to see if it includes any of the following:

- a specific child or children may be at risk of harm (for example, allegations that another worker is abusing a child in their care or that there are high numbers of unallocated cases in a children's social care team)
- there are wider or systemic failures in safeguarding practice (for example children who are looked after are not being visited by their social workers)
- children are not receiving the right quality of care but this does not suggest a risk to their safety (for example, children are not registered with a GP or are missing routine medical appointments)
- a social care service is not meeting regulatory requirements (for example, if the registered manager of a regulated service is misusing their services' resources)

We will review your information or complaint along with other intelligence that we have about a service. This will determine lines of enquiry we may need to follow up on during inspection.

However, we can only consider your information as one part of the evidence that tells us about the overall quality or suitability of that service.

What Ofsted will do

We will look at any details you share with us along with other information we have about the service. We will use this to help us decide how best to inspect or regulate that service.

We will write to confirm that we have received your concern if you have given us an email or postal address. We may also contact you again for further information. However, we do not usually write to let you know about the actions we have or may take in the future.

The action we take depends on the type of children's social care service, the type of concern and whether it indicates that the service may have deteriorated. We may do one or more of the following:

- refer the matter to the child protection team in the relevant local authority for urgent attention
- contact an appropriate person at the children' social care service and ask them to make enquiries and respond to Ofsted with more information

- review the focus and timing of the next inspection, visit, or annual engagement meeting, and bring this forward if appropriate
- hold the information for follow-up at the next planned inspection, visit, or annual engagement meeting – we may collate this in themes within our inspection framework rather than reviewing individual pieces of information
- undertake a regulatory inspection

Complaints about a service we regulate

We regulate and inspect children's social care services in England, such as:

- children's homes
- residential family centres
- independent fostering agencies
- voluntary adoption agencies
- adoption support agencies
- residential holiday schemes for disabled children

These social care services must meet certain government regulations and standards in order to be registered. You can find more information about our powers and social care work in the [social care compliance handbook](#).

We will look at your complaint when we assess whether those providing the service are meeting the relevant regulations, standards and statutory guidance.

Complaints about a service we inspect but do not regulate

We inspect:

- local authority children's services
- the welfare of children in boarding schools and residential special schools
- residential provision in further education colleges
- Cafcass
- secure training centres

We may use the information you provide to inform our next inspection of that service. We may also pass the information to, or advise you to contact, another organisation that does have the power to investigate complaints.

Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is when an employee of an organisation passes on information that they reasonably believe shows wrongdoing or a cover up by that organisation. This might be about activity that is illegal, that risks others' health and safety or that is about poor practice/leadership or failure to meet statutory requirements. As long as you fit the [criteria for whistleblowing](#), you are protected under the law.

Ofsted's Chief Inspector is a [prescribed person](#) – this means they are listed in legislation as someone who you can whistleblow to about children's social care services.

You cannot whistleblow to us about secure training centres and youth offending teams. However, you can still share information with us. If you do, we will listen to your concerns and may share them with the Ministry of Justice.

You need to be a worker. This includes employees, temporary agency staff, home workers, trainees on vocational schemes, and people whose employment has ended. Self-employed people, volunteers or foster carers are not covered by whistleblowing legislation. However, we will listen to their concerns seriously and investigate or raise them where appropriate.

The legislation that underpins our whistleblowing role is the [Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998](#) and the [Employment Rights Act 1996](#).

How to whistleblow

Your organisation may have a whistleblowing policy that you can follow.

If not, you can [contact us](#) or the NSPCC. The [NSPCC is also a prescribed person](#) for providing protection to those making any disclosures about child welfare and protection.

Independent advice

We cannot advise whether you will receive legal protection in your specific case, but you can get independent advice for this at any time. You may also want to check who is the best person to whistleblow to, discuss how to raise your concern or simply to talk the matter through in confidence.

You can do this with:

- your union or professional body
- the Local Safeguarding Children Board for your area (or the local safeguarding arrangements that replace them may also have a whistleblowing policy)
- the independent whistleblowing charity [Public Concern at Work](#)
- an independent legal adviser

Whistleblowing in confidence

If you whistleblow to us anonymously it may be harder for you to receive the legal protections available to whistleblowers. You may not be able to prove that any reprisal you may suffer is the result of whistleblowing, because there would be no evidence linking you to the information you gave us.

Annual report

Ofsted is required to produce an [annual report](#) on whistleblowing disclosures made to it by workers. The aim of this is to increase transparency in the way that whistleblowing disclosures are dealt with and to reassure whistleblowers that their disclosures are taken seriously.

This report includes:

- the number of qualifying workers' disclosures received by Ofsted
- the number of disclosures where Ofsted decided to take further action in that period

We do not include information that could identify anyone involved or compromise the confidentiality of any ongoing investigations.

Confidentiality

We encourage you to share your identity with us, even if you want us to keep your identity confidential from the service you're contacting us about.

If we know who you are, it will help us to keep your identity confidential when we look into your concerns. It's also useful if we need to contact you for more information.

We will always do everything we can to help keep your identity confidential. However, depending on the nature of the information you provide, this may not be possible. For example:

- if your information indicates a specific child is at risk, we must pass this on to the authority responsible for protecting that child even if it risks identifying you. The protection of children will take priority over requests not to be identified. However, we will do everything we can to share the information in a way that protects your identity
- if we contact a social care service for further information or we make enquiries through inspection, others may guess that you have contacted us – this could happen if the information you provide could not have come from anyone else
- if we take any action against the provider which results in a court case, or an appeal, it will not be possible to keep your identity confidential at this stage

If your letter or email does not say whether you want us to keep your identity confidential, we will assume that you wish us to do so.

We know that there may be circumstances when you would like to contact us anonymously. If you do, we will treat your concerns just as seriously as if you had given us your personal details.

Contact us

Email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or call us on 0300 123 1231.

Whistleblowing

If you're an employee at a children's social care organisation who wants to whistleblow to Ofsted:

- call our Whistleblowing Hotline on 0300 1233155 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)
- email whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk
- write to: WBHL, Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

You can also contact the [NSPCC National Whistleblowing Advice Line](#).

Making a complaint about a different service

Complain about:

- a local authority service via the [Local Government Ombudsman](#)
- Cafcass via the [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman](#)
- [a school or childminder](#)
- [further education colleges](#)
- [secure training centres](#)

Data protection and freedom of information

We will follow all applicable UK and EU data protection laws in how we treat personal information, including the [Data Protection Act 2018](#) and [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#). For more information see our [social care privacy notice](#) and our [personal information charter](#).

If we receive a request under the Freedom of Information Act to provide information you have shared with us, we will try to maintain your confidentiality as far as legislation allows us to do so. For more information see [Ofsted's freedom of information guidance](#).

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