

Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspections of local authority children's services

This document sets out the framework and guidance for inspecting local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers.

These inspections focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements:

- to help and protect children
- the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those children who return home
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- the experiences and progress of care leavers.

In addition, we evaluate the effectiveness of leaders and managers and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people and the quality of professional practice.

We published this version of the framework in September 2018. There is a summary of the changes we made at the end of this document.

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Introduction

What the inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework means.

1. This document sets out the framework for inspecting local authority children's services. ILACS is an inspection 'system', which comprises the following:
 - standard inspections (usually for local authorities judged requires improvement to be good)
 - short inspections (for local authorities judged good or outstanding)
 - focused visits
 - monitoring visits
 - activity outside inspection.
2. This framework and guidance is to help inspectors carry out inspections and visits of local authority children's services. It helps them to be consistent in inspections while being flexible enough to respond to the individual circumstances of each local authority. We will periodically review and amend this framework and evaluation criteria.

Inspection principles

Focusing on children, being consistent and prioritising resources.

3. Ofsted's corporate strategy¹ outlines how we will conduct inspection and regulation that is:
 - Intelligent: All of our work will be evidence-led and we will work to ensure that our evaluation tools and frameworks will be valid and reliable.
 - Responsible: Our frameworks will be fair. We will seek to reduce inspection burdens and make our expectations and findings clear.
 - Focused: We will target our time and resources where they can lead directly to improvement.
4. Our approach to the inspection of local authority children's services is further underpinned by three principles that apply to all social care inspections. Inspection should:
 - focus on the things that matter most to children's lives
 - be consistent in our expectations of providers
 - prioritise our work where improvement is needed most.

¹ Ofsted strategy 2017–22, September 2017; www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-strategy-2017-to-2022.

Whole-system approach

These are the activities that are part of the ILACS system.

5. ILACS is a system of inspection. Under this system, we use the intelligence and information we have to inform decisions about how best to inspect each local authority.² This system includes:
 - local authorities sharing an annual self-evaluation of the quality and impact of social work practice
 - an annual engagement meeting between our regional representatives and the local authority to review the self-evaluation and to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with each other in future
 - our local authority intelligence system (LAIS) (which brings data and information into a single record)
 - focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children
 - standard and short inspections where we make judgements using our four-point scale
 - joint targeted area inspection (JTAI).³
6. We have described each part of this system in more detail later in the framework.

Applying a proportionate and risk-based approach to inspection

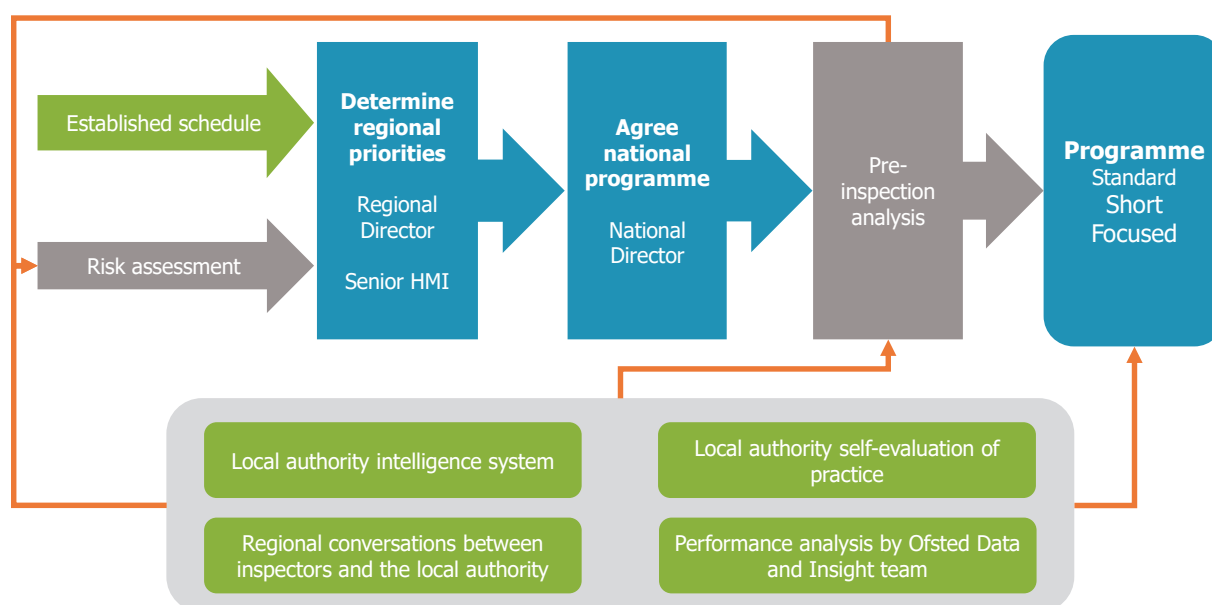
The things that help us decide when to inspect a local authority.

7. There is no fixed cycle or end date for the programme. Under the ILACS system, we use the intelligence and information we have to inform decisions about how best to inspect each local authority.
8. There will be times when concerns arise about a local authority. The regional director will decide whether to undertake an inspection (standard or short inspection), at which we make a graded judgement, or whether a focused visit would be more appropriate.

² Local area special educational needs and disability (LA SEND) inspections are inspections of the local area that sit outside ILACS, but we will take them into account when we schedule inspections.

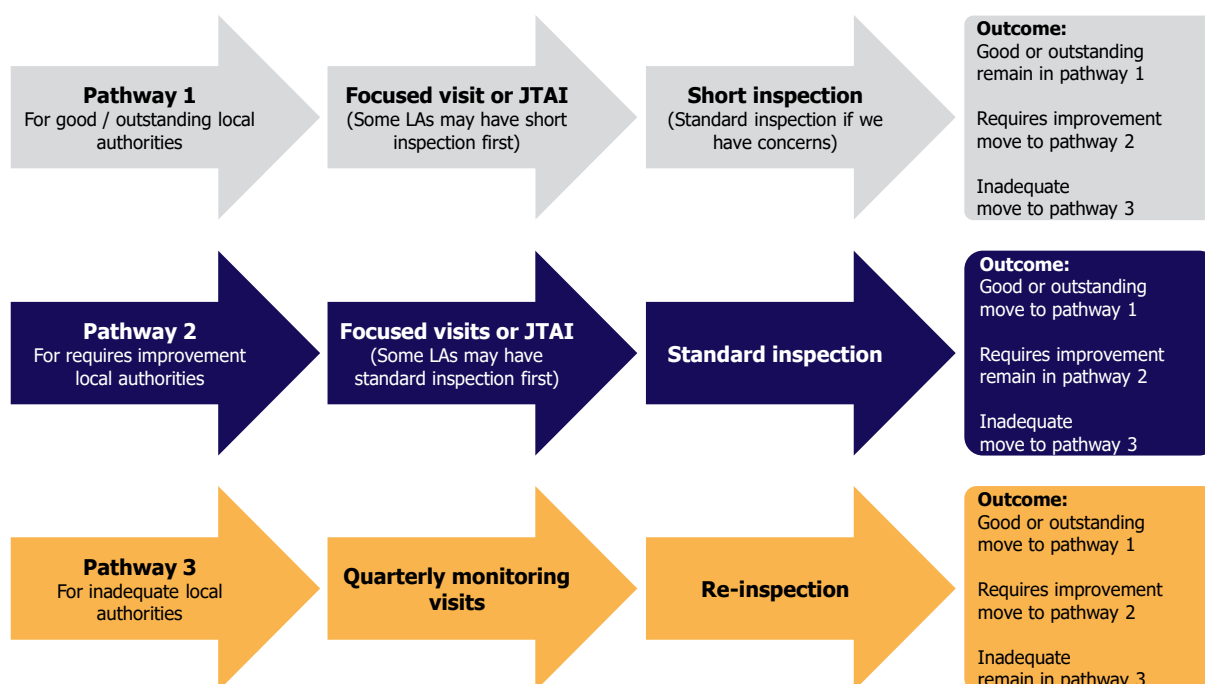
³ Joint inspections of arrangements and services for children in need of help and protection, Ofsted, Care Quality Commission (CQC), HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), and HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation), January 2016; www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-inspections-of-arrangements-and-services-for-children-in-need-of-help-and-protection

9. In most cases, if the next standard or short inspection is not due, we will carry out a focused visit. This gives the local authority and us the opportunity to identify what is going well and what needs to improve before the next judgement inspection.
10. After a focused visit, we will not usually follow up with an urgent inspection. We will publish the focused visit letter setting out the areas that the local authority needs to address. We will review the progress in these areas through the local authority's self-evaluation and the annual engagement meeting until the next judgement inspection happens.
11. This approach aims to support improvement, while still holding the local authority children's services to account in meeting their legal responsibilities to children in need of help, protection and care.
12. Within the ILACS system, deciding which type of inspection to deploy in which local authority is a complex and dynamic process. The following diagram shows the process.



Proportionate timing of inspection

13. We will inspect local authorities based on the intelligence we have about them and their most recent inspection judgement. The timing of standard and short inspections will usually be within six months before or six months after the three-year anniversary. The following diagram summarises the different inspection pathways:



14. Inspections will not usually begin over the Christmas and New Year period. And also, the only activities that might take place in August would be planned monitoring visits and focused visits by agreement or if concerns arise.
15. Each Ofsted region will decide when to inspect each local authority and whether to carry out a standard inspection, short inspection or focused visit. The national programme will be agreed by the National Director (Social Care).

Deferring an inspection

16. We will not usually defer inspections or visits. Staff absence, including the absence of the DCS, is not a reason for deferral. We will only defer inspections and visits if there is a strong case that not doing so might place staff at risk or if inspectors are severely restricted in their ability to gather secure evidence. Situations like these might be:
 - serious weather conditions that make access to sites for inspectors and staff difficult and/or dangerous
 - a power failure meaning that inspectors cannot access electronic records for a prolonged period
 - an unexpected and serious incident, such as a terrorist attack.

Pathway 1: local authorities judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection

17. Local authorities judged to be good or outstanding at their most recent inspection will usually receive a short inspection. The short inspection will usually take place about three years after the previous inspection. If that short

inspection results in the local authority being judged requires improvement to be good, it will move to pathway two.

18. In between inspections, the local authority will usually receive one focused visit or a JTAI.
19. If we hold intelligence suggesting a significant deterioration in performance before a short inspection, including any areas of concern identified at a focused visit, we may decide to carry out a standard inspection.

Pathway 2: local authorities judged requires improvement to be good at their most recent inspection

20. Local authorities judged to require improvement to be good at their most recent inspection will receive a standard inspection. The standard inspection will usually take place about three years after the previous inspection. If that standard inspection results in the local authority being judged good or outstanding, it will follow the process described in pathway one.
21. In between inspections, the local authority will receive up to two focused visits. A focused visit may be replaced by a JTAI.

Pathway 3: local authorities judged inadequate at their most recent inspection

22. Local authorities judged inadequate at their most recent inspection will receive monitoring visits followed by a re-inspection. We will usually carry between four and six monitoring visits before the re-inspection. We will re-inspect an inadequate local authority using a standard inspection.
23. If, at the re-inspection, its overall effectiveness grade improves, that local authority will then enter the relevant pathway. Should it remain inadequate, it will remain in pathway three.
24. The table below summarises the range of inspections that will exist under the ILACS system by the Ofsted inspection grade.

Inadequate local authority	Requires improvement to be good local authority	Good or outstanding local authority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Quarterly monitoring visits ■ Standard inspection (after we have completed monitoring visits) ■ Shared self-evaluation ■ Annual engagement meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Standard inspection (once in a three year period) ■ Up to two focused visits in between inspections ■ Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit) ■ Shared self-evaluation ■ Annual engagement meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Short inspection (once in a three year period) ■ Up to two focused visits in between inspections ■ Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit) ■ Shared self-evaluation ■ Annual engagement meeting

ILACS and other joint inspections

25. We will continue to undertake both JTAIs and LA SEND inspections. We will continue to coordinate the scheduling of inspections of ILACS and the LA SEND programme to avoid any clash of timing and to minimise the burden on local authorities. The scope of ILACS does not replicate that of the LA SEND inspection.
26. The four inspectorates⁴ remain committed to carrying out up to 10 JTAIs each calendar year. The scheduling of the JTAIs is a complex task. We try to avoid any unnecessary clash of timing and minimise the burden on each of the inspected bodies.

Activity outside of inspection

Guidance about the timing, scope and arrangements for self-evaluation and annual engagement.

Local authority self-evaluation of social work practice

27. Each year, we will ask local authorities to share a self-evaluation of social work practice with us and meet with our regional representatives to discuss it. This part of the framework is voluntary, but plays an important role in our understanding of local authorities and how they work. We have developed this section in conjunction with the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

⁴ Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), HMI Constabulary and Fire Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and HMI Probation

28. Engagement between us and local authorities outside of inspection will help us to apply the risk-based and proportionate approach that ILACS offers. It will help us to carry out our inspections and visits more efficiently. It will also help ensure that inspection frequency and arrangements are appropriate to that local authority.
29. We ask local authorities to share an annual self-evaluation of social work practice with us. This will help us to see whether leaders and managers have a grip on practice and are taking suitable action.
30. We will not ask local authorities judged inadequate to share a self-evaluation until the monitoring visits in the first 12 months are complete. Engagement (outside the monitoring visits) will focus on the quality of the local authority action planning.
31. The self-evaluation should draw on existing documentation and activity. It should reflect the local authority's business as usual so as to avoid additional burden. We do not expect local authorities to undertake additional work to inform the self-evaluation.
32. Inspectors look at a local authority's most recent self-evaluation when preparing for the next inspection or focused visit.
33. The self-evaluation should answer three questions:
 - What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
 - How do you know it?
 - What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
34. There is no set time each year that we ask local authorities to share a self-evaluation. The timing should take into account any planned regional peer review and challenge activity. To be most effective, this should happen before the planned annual engagement meeting, but there is no expectation that local authorities schedule their work around our timelines. Ideally, we ask the local authority to share this early enough for us to analyse its content, but not so far in advance that the information is out of date by the time of the annual engagement meeting.
35. When there is a significant gap between sharing the self-evaluation and the annual engagement meeting, it is helpful if the local authority can refresh the self-evaluation with the most up-to-date data and information. A regional representative will contact the director of children's services (DCS) to agree appropriate arrangements.

36. There is no prescribed format or content for the self-evaluation. Local authorities should apply the following principles. The self-evaluation:
- should answer the three questions outlined above (paragraph 34)
 - should set out the main themes and learning
 - should make sense as a standalone document (appendices can be included, but should be kept to a minimum)
 - may be an existing document or combination of documents
 - should be succinct, focused and evaluative; overly long self-evaluations are unlikely to be helpful to the local authority or inspectors.
37. It is for the local authority to determine which documentation and information to draw on for the self-evaluation. The following list offers some suggested sources:
- an overview of how the local authority evaluates the impact of social work practice with children and families
 - high-level performance reports that give the most recent position of the local authority case audit plans
 - case audit summaries of learning
 - outcome of multi-agency section 11 audit work
 - recent learning about frontline social work practice, for example from complaints or serious case and management reviews
 - feedback from children and families.
38. If the self-evaluation identifies weaknesses in practice and the local authority has credible plans to take clear, appropriate and effective action in response, we will treat this as effective leadership rather than an automatic trigger for an inspection or focused visit. Our regional representatives will discuss these issues with the local authority at the annual engagement meeting.

Annual engagement meeting

39. This meeting may be solely about children's social care or part of a broader meeting covering education and early years. This will be determined by the region.
40. The meeting should be carried out in the spirit of positive transparency and benefit everyone involved.
41. The meeting is not an opportunity for inspectors to evaluate direct social work practice with children and families. The intelligence gathered from the meeting will inform any plans for future inspection activity and focused visits.

42. The meeting should cover:
 - the content of the self-evaluation – what do leaders know about practice and outcomes, and the evidence that supports this
 - the impact of the self-evaluation – what leaders are doing to address weaknesses in practice and maintain or improve good practice, including evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of their actions
 - actions taken in response to previous inspections
 - the local authority's current financial, political and professional practice context
 - the broader issues that affect delivery of children's social care services, for example schools and early years provision
 - the possible scope of a focused visit
 - the approximate timing of the next self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting.
43. The annual engagement meeting will be planned for a mutually convenient time, but does not need to be at exactly the same point in time every year. Its timing will usually be linked to when the local authority shares their self-evaluation so that the information is up to date.
44. The timing of the annual engagement meeting should take into account planned peer review arrangements and activity relating to a regional improvement alliance.
45. The meeting, chaired by a regional representative from Ofsted, may focus on other local authority duties, for example school inspection, but the meeting should include the appropriate personnel and allow sufficient time for children's social care issues to be explored.
46. The DCS and our regional director and/or social care senior HMI or HMI will attend.⁵ It is for the DCS to determine who else attends from the local authority, for example the assistant director responsible for social care or the practice leader. For the meeting to be effective, those attending the meeting should have a clear purpose to be there.
47. The regional senior HMI and the DCS will agree the agenda in advance of the meeting.

⁵ The DCS has professional responsibility for children's services, including operational matters as set out in the statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services (April 2013).

48. We will write to the DCS within a month of the meeting. The letter will not be published nor contain any judgements about practice. It will set out:
- the date of the meeting and who attended
 - a factual summary of the agenda items discussed
 - the possible scope of a future focused visit
 - the approximate timing of the following year's self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting
 - any next steps agreed by either the local authority or us.

Scope

What the inspections will cover: the children whose experiences inspectors will evaluate during inspections and visits.

49. In standard and short inspections, inspectors will evaluate the experiences of the children and young people listed below. On focused and monitoring visits, they will evaluate the experiences of one or more of these groups of children and young people:
- who are at risk of harm (but who have not yet reached the 'significant harm' threshold) and for whom a preventative service would provide the help that they and their family need to reduce the likelihood of that risk of harm escalating and to reduce the need for statutory intervention⁶
 - who have been referred to the local authority, including those for whom urgent action has to be taken to protect them; those subject to further assessment;⁷ and those subject to child protection enquiries
 - who become the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan that sets out the help they and their families will receive to keep them safe and promote their welfare
 - who have been assessed as no longer needing a child protection plan, but who may need continuing help and support
 - who are receiving (or whose families are receiving) social work services because there are significant levels of concern about their safety and welfare, but these have not reached the significant harm threshold or the threshold to become looked after
 - who are missing from education or are being offered alternative provision

⁶ These children may be known by any person with a duty under section 11 of the Children Act 2004; section 40 of the Childcare Act 2006; under section 175 or any regulations made under 157 of the Education Act 2002; section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, a member of the Local Safeguarding Children Board; or a person associated with a commissioned service, including local voluntary services.

⁷ This includes children subject to private fostering arrangements.

- looked after either by being accommodated under section 20 or by being placed 'in care' during or as a result of proceedings under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 and those accommodated through the police powers of protection or emergency protection orders⁸
- aged 16 or 17 who are preparing to leave care and are 'eligible';⁹ those aged 16 or 17 who have left care and are 'relevant';¹⁰ young people aged 18 and above and are 'former relevant';¹¹ and young people aged 18 to 25 who qualify as 'former relevant children pursuing further education or training',¹² including children in houses in multiple occupation (HMO).
- who have left care to return home or who are living with families under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order or an adoption order.¹³

50. In addition, inspectors will evaluate:

- the impact of leaders and managers on social work practice with children and families
- whether the local authority's own evaluation of the quality and impact of its performance and practice is accurate.

Standard and short inspections¹⁴

The arrangements for inspections where we make a graded judgement about the local authority.

51. Inspections will focus on social workers' direct practice with families by:

- scrutinising and discussing the sample of children's cases that reflect the scope of the inspection alongside discussions with practitioners working with the child or young person – this will include social workers and may also include other professionals and providers; these discussions do not have to be in person and in some cases will be by telephone during the notice period when practicable

⁸ Including those children and young people who are detained, unaccompanied child migrants or asylum seekers.

⁹ Defined in paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, and regulation 40 of the Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010 (as amended).

¹⁰ Defined in section 23A(2) of the Children Act 1989.

¹¹ Defined in section 23C(1) of the Children Act 1989.

¹² Defined in section 23CA(1) as a former relevant child in relation to whom the duties in 23C(2)(3) and (4) no longer apply, and s/he has informed the local authority that s/he wants to pursue or is pursuing a programme of education or training.

¹³ Residence and contact orders made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 were replaced by child arrangements orders through the Children and Families Act 2014;

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

¹⁴ Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) carry out these inspections under section 136 (2) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA). Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has the power to carry out inspections of local authority children's services functions as listed in section 135 of the EIA.

- where possible and appropriate, having meetings with children, young people, care leavers, parents and carers, foster carers and adopters
- shadowing staff in their day-to-day work
- when possible and appropriate, observing practice in multi-agency/single agency meetings or more likely parts of meetings that relate to the protection of children and young people and in reviews for children in care; inspectors will take opportunities for observing practice as they arise.

Standard inspection arrangements

52. On a standard inspection, inspectors will gather evidence across the ILACS scope. We will give five working days' notice of the inspection. The inspection team for a standard inspection will usually be four social care inspectors.¹⁵ In addition, a social care regulatory inspector will be on site for up to two days and a schools inspector will be on site for one day.
53. Inspection teams may include an additional inspector who will be shadowing the work of their colleagues. Any activity they undertake will be for the purpose of their training and development or to evaluate the inspection framework and methodology. They will not undertake any inspection work independently or gather evidence that will inform the inspection judgements.

Notice period – off-site	Monday	Lead inspector phone call to DCS to announce the inspection Afternoon 'set-up' telephone conference – lead inspector and DCS
	Tuesday	Local authority shares child-level data and information about audits.
	Wednesday	Local authority shares performance and management information.
	Thursday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence
	Friday	Telephone conference team meeting (including an Ofsted analytical officer)
Week 1	Monday	Lead inspector on site in the afternoon to meet DCS and set-up the inspection Full team on site pm
	Tuesday – Thursday	Full team on site gathering evidence
	Friday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence

¹⁵ For some smaller local authorities we may send fewer inspectors.

Week 2	Monday	Full team on site from lunchtime gathering evidence
	Tuesday – Thursday	Full team on site gathering evidence
	Friday	Feeding back inspection findings Team off site by early afternoon

Short inspection arrangements

54. On a short inspection, inspectors will gather evidence across the ILACS scope. We will give five working days' notice of the inspection. The inspection team for a short inspection will usually be four social care inspectors.¹⁶ In addition, a social care regulatory inspector will be on site for up to two days and a schools inspector will be on site for one day.
55. Inspection teams may include an additional inspector who will be shadowing the work of their colleagues. Any activity they undertake will be for the purpose of their training and development or to evaluate the inspection framework and methodology. They will not undertake any inspection work independently or gather evidence that will inform the inspection judgements.

Notice period – off-site	Monday	Lead inspector phone call to DCS to announce the inspection Afternoon "set-up" telephone conference – lead inspector and DCS
	Tuesday	Local authority shares child-level data and information about audits.
	Wednesday	Local authority shares performance and management information.
	Thursday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence
	Friday	Telephone conference team meeting (including an Ofsted analytical officer)
Week 1	Monday	Lead inspector on site in the afternoon to meet DCS and set-up the inspection Full team on site pm
	Tuesday – Thursday	Full team on site gathering evidence
	Friday	Feeding back inspection findings Team offsite by early afternoon.

¹⁶ For some smaller local authorities we may send fewer inspectors.

56. A short inspection covers the ILACS scope, which is the same as a standard inspection. Judgements are made against the same grade descriptors. However, it is not a two-week inspection delivered in one week. Inspectors preparing for a short inspection will start with a mind-set that 'this is a good local authority'. This assumption is based on:
- the previous inspection judgement
 - a focused visit or JTAI that has reinforced earlier findings
 - the quality of self-evaluation over the preceding years, which will have been explored during the annual engagement meetings
 - information held on the LAIS that supports a view of continuing strong performance.
57. In a short inspection, inspectors will seek to answer three questions:
- Has the quality and impact of practice been maintained?
 - Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have improved?
 - Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have deteriorated?
58. This approach enables the lead inspector to prioritise primary evidence gathering on the areas that need the greatest focus. It also enables the team to test the validity of the most recent self-evaluation by testing samples of casework. This will help inspectors to quickly close down lines of enquiry.
59. Evaluating individual children's records that have already been audited by the local authority is another effective way to answer the three questions set out above. If the local authority's evaluation of practice is in line with our evaluation, this will usually reduce the need for further primary evidence in that part of the inspection.

Further guidance for short and standard inspections

Inspecting against the scope and making judgements based on the evaluation criteria

60. Inspectors inspect across the areas included in the scope of the inspection and record their evidence under the 17 headings in the evaluation criteria. Each heading has a number of criteria that describe the features of what a good service or what good experiences and progress for children look like.
- Inspectors do not have to gather evidence against each individual criteria.** The evaluation criteria help the inspection team make the correct judgement on the four-point grading scheme.

The order of evidence gathering in standard and short inspections

61. In previous inspection programmes, inspections have followed 'the journey of the child' – starting with the 'front door', then help and protection, children in care and finally leaving care. For standard and short inspections, this may not always be the best approach.
62. The factors that influence where the evidence gathering will start are:
 - the geography of the local authority – for example, we may not always start in the main centre of population
 - previous known strengths and weaknesses (including the findings from a focused visit or the most recent annual engagement meeting); the lead may wish to inspect the stronger areas first to swiftly close down areas of enquiry, so that the inspection can focus on whether performance has improved in a previously weaker area
 - structure of services – where teams are located and across how many offices
 - logistical issues – where inspectors need to go at the start of the work to sort practical issues (security passes, access to IT systems, etc.).
63. An inspection might therefore start, for example in the children in care service. In these circumstances, inspectors may gain helpful insights into the help and protection services through evaluating the experiences of those children who have recently become looked after.
64. In all cases, it will be for the lead inspector, with the quality assurance manager, to determine the approach. The lead inspector will provide the rationale to the DCS.

Off-site evaluation

65. Off-site evaluation and planning are important parts of all inspections. All inspectors will have access to LAIS. For standard and short inspections, the Ofsted analytical officer will coordinate the data, provide a pre-inspection analysis (PIA) and discuss priorities for the inspection with the inspection team. The analytical officer will ensure that the PIA contains the information the lead inspector and team will need to inform the inspection planning and on-site activity. This will summarise:
 - a contextual overview of the local authority
 - findings from relevant inspections (including previous focused visits) and regulatory activity, including some inspections carried out by other inspectorates
 - regional intelligence about the effectiveness and impact of the virtual school on the educational progress of children in care

- the summary of findings from published serious case reviews
 - analysis of published statistics and national comparisons
 - evidence from whistleblowing or complaints to Ofsted
 - regional intelligence including events of public concern, such as high-profile court cases or media issues
 - search and review of recently published documentation, such as the independent reviewing officer annual report.
66. The PIA will include the regional senior HMI's analysis of the most recent self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting with the local authority.
67. Annex A lists the information that we request from the local authority at the start of the inspection.
68. The lead inspector will have time allocated, before fieldwork begins, to review the pre-inspection analysis, information on LAIS, the information from Annex A and the views of children, young people, parents and staff expressed through the social care annual point-in time-surveys run by Ofsted. The lead inspector will use this information to:
- ensure that the fieldwork is properly focused and used to the best effect in collecting first-hand evidence
 - inform which site(s) within the local authority to visit during inspection
 - identify initial lines of enquiry for the inspection
 - allocate information to the inspection team for them to analyse.
69. Only initial lines of enquiry will be generated at this point. These will be few in number and themed around priority areas. The lead inspector will share verbally the lines of enquiry with the local authority at the beginning of the inspection. The lead inspector will explain to the local authority how these lines will be pursued and what, if any, specific information is required from them as a result.
70. We do not expect the local authority to produce documents and data in response to these initial lines of enquiry unless specifically requested by the lead inspector. During the inspection, additional requests for further documentation will be kept to an absolute minimum and agreed by the lead inspector.
71. All inspectors have time allocated to prepare for the inspection. All team inspectors must read the PIA and familiarise themselves with the relevant material and profile of the local authority area before arriving on site. The lead inspector is likely to identify other documents for inspectors to read before the on-site activity.

72. Inspectors must review the Annex A information provided by the local authority. The lead inspector may decide that some documents must be read by all team members; others will be read by only one inspector and then summarised for the team. Some documents may be used as reference material and read only when required. The lead inspector will ensure that key points of analysis are collated and disseminated to the inspection team to inform the inspection.

Notifying the local authority and requesting information

73. The lead inspector will ensure that the local authority (usually the DCS) is notified by telephone of the inspection by 9.30am five working days before the fieldwork starts.¹⁷ As part of this telephone call, the lead inspector will also arrange to meet with the DCS or the most senior manager available at the earliest opportunity when they arrive on site.
74. Immediately following the telephone call to the local authority, the lead inspector will email the DCS to confirm the start of the inspection and ask them to share information set out in Annex A. Annex A lists information we think the local authority will already maintain to inform their oversight and management of their service. On this basis, we do not consider that the information we request is unreasonable.
75. If the DCS is not available, the lead inspector will speak with or email the most senior manager available and ask them to notify the DCS or, if the DCS is not available, the chief executive. The non-availability of the DCS or a senior manager will not delay the start of the inspection.
76. The lead inspector will ask the DCS to identify a link support person for the inspection. It is important that the link person has ready access to the DCS and senior leaders and sufficient authority to be able to respond to the lead inspector's requests. In the week before inspectors are on site, the lead inspector will work with the link person and/or DCS to complete the following activities in preparation for the on-site activity.
 - Answer questions about the scope of the inspection.
 - Outline the format and methodology of the inspection, which will focus almost exclusively on practice with children and families. Meetings will be kept to a minimum, will only look into matters arising from case evaluations and only take place at the lead inspector's request
 - Discuss how inspectors will directly consider the experiences of children, young people and families as an integral part of the inspection. Where opportunities arise during the fieldwork to speak with or observe contact

¹⁷ If notification is due on a Monday that is a bank holiday, the notification will take place on the previous working day – Friday. In the case of Easter weekend, notification would be on Thursday.

with children, young people and families, the local social work staff will be asked to obtain their agreement to observe any meetings and speak to inspectors

- Agree practical arrangements, such as work space, access to files and information technology systems, and any staff support required to access these files and systems
 - Agree arrangements to meet with the DCS and his/her senior leadership team for regular keep-in-touch meetings and the feedback meeting.
 - Provide contact details for the lead inspector, inspection team members and the allocated senior HMI responsible for quality assurance.
 - Provide information for affected/relevant staff, such as copies of the summary of the framework explaining the purpose of the inspection.
 - Gain an understanding of how the local area services are structured, as well as any issues specific to the site(s) being inspected.
 - Provide an opportunity for the local authority representatives to explain the local authority's local context, key strengths and challenges.
 - Clarify whether there are any serious incidents that are awaiting notification or have been notified to Ofsted recently. This should include significant and current investigations (including police investigations), national or local learning reviews and local issues of high media interest.
77. During the week before inspectors arrive on site, an Ofsted analytical officer will ask to speak with an analyst at the local authority. This is to discuss issues about data quality, performance documents, the performance reporting process and the types and breadth of management information produced.
78. The lead inspector may also ask for a phone conversation with the lead member for children's services and/or the local authority chief executive.

On-site inspection

79. The lead inspector and three inspectors will arrive on site on Monday afternoon. All inspectors will show their inspector identity badges. They do not need to carry copies of Disclosure and Barring Service checks.
80. When the lead inspector arrives onsite, they will meet with the DCS and/or the most senior manager available. At this meeting, the lead inspector will review the matters and arrangements discussed in the previous week. The lead inspector will answer any remaining questions and ask local leaders to confirm that the practical arrangements inspectors requested are in place.
81. When planning the on-site aspect of inspection, the lead inspector should ensure that:
- support is provided to facilitate communication with children, young people, care leavers, carers and parents who require additional support

- the plan allows realistic travel time for inspectors between activities
 - the plan allows sufficient time and flexibility for inspectors to pursue lines of enquiry
 - staff are given the opportunity to provide their evidence separately to those who manage them
 - if the need for any meeting arises as a result of evaluating children's experiences, the lead inspector asks for this as soon as the need becomes apparent; these meetings may be held by telephone as well as in person
 - the way inspector-time is planned includes opportunities for team members to reflect on, record and analyse evidence, individually and as a team.
82. The schedule for the inspection will develop throughout the inspection in response to issues emerging from evaluating children and young people's experiences. The lead inspector has overall responsibility for the schedule.
83. On-site inspection activity will not normally continue after 6pm on any field work day.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster and adoptive carers

84. During a standard or short inspection, the social care regulatory inspector will be on site for up to two days during the fieldwork. During this time, their focus will be on evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster and adoptive carers.
85. When evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support of prospective and current foster and adoptive carers, the social care regulatory inspector will evaluate the experiences of:
- up to four foster carer households (including a recent carer assessment)
 - up to four adopter households (including a recent carer assessment).
86. In addition, the social care regulatory inspector will speak to:
- foster carers and adopters
 - staff and managers who support foster and adoptive carers
 - the foster and adoption panel chairs.
87. Conversations with carers and staff will usually be by telephone. The lead inspector will ask the local authority to help arrange these calls.
88. Social care regulatory inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective foster and adoptive carers against the criteria in this framework that cover arrangements to secure timely permanence for all children.

89. Local authorities may be part of a regional adoption agency (RAA) where groups of local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) work together to improve their adoption services. In these circumstances, it remains the responsibility of each local authority to demonstrate how the arrangements comply with their statutory responsibilities and meet the needs of local children.
90. If a local authority manages its own recruitment, assessment, training and support for adopters, inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of these arrangements. Where these are managed by an RAA, inspectors will look at the local authority's arrangements to assure itself that the RAA meets the needs of local children.
91. To understand how the local authority works with the regional adoption agency to meet the needs of local children, inspectors will speak to the local authority's link officer for the RAA and the independent chair of the adoption panel. Annex C has more information on inspections where the local authority is part of an RAA.

Evaluating the educational progress of children in care and care leavers

92. Each standard and short inspection will include a schools HMI. The schools HMI will be allocated two days – the first Monday and Tuesday of fieldwork.
93. On the Monday, working off site, they will evaluate data and information to provide analysis and lines of enquiry for their second day and more broadly for the lead inspector. They may contact the virtual school head for a conversation by phone.
94. On the Tuesday, they will be on site and interview the virtual school head and, if appropriate, the local authority data personnel. They will evaluate some case studies of specific children's and care leavers' progress. They may contact specific schools by phone for further information.
95. The schools HMI will analyse data and information about:
 - the educational progress of children in care and care leavers
 - elective home-educated children
 - children missing education.

Making judgements at standard or short inspections

96. Inspectors will make the following graded judgements:
 - Overall effectiveness
 - The experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection
 - The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers
 - The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.

97. Inspectors will make their graded judgements on a four-point scale:
 - outstanding
 - good
 - requires improvement to be good
 - inadequate.
98. Inspectors will evaluate the experiences of children, young people and families and the services they receive using the evaluation criteria as a benchmark. Inspectors will use professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings. A judgement of good will be made if the inspection team concludes that the evidence overall sits most appropriately with a finding of good. This is what we describes as 'best fit'.
99. The overall effectiveness judgement is derived from findings in each of the three other judgement areas. Inspectors will use both evidence and their professional judgement to award the overall effectiveness grade.
100. If inspectors find widespread or serious failure resulting in harm, continued risk of harm or failure to safeguard the welfare of children and young people in either the arrangements to protect or care for them, they will always give an overall effectiveness judgement of inadequate.
101. It is possible for the impact of leaders to be judged good or requires improvement to be good even if any of the other judgements given is inadequate. Inspectors will make this judgement if leaders and managers show sufficient understanding of the widespread or serious failure and have taken effective action to prioritise, challenge and make sustained improvement to services. Inspectors will acknowledge this in the report. The overall judgement will be inadequate because children's experiences have the most weight in determining this judgement.
102. If, at the end of fieldwork, local authority's children's services are judged inadequate, inspectors will follow the section in this guidance on monitoring inadequate local authorities.

Focused visits¹⁸

Focused visits evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children.

Focused visit arrangements

103. Focused visits will happen between standard and short inspections. We will usually give five working days' notice of the visit. Usually, two inspectors will be on site for two days contained within one week. Focused visits will include some or all of the same inspection activity as a standard or short inspection.

Notice period – off-site	Monday	Lead inspector off-site evaluation of evidence
	Tuesday	Lead inspector phone call to DCS to announce the focused visit Afternoon "set-up" telephone conference – lead inspector and DCS
	Wednesday	Local authority share child level data, information about audits and performance and management information
	Thursday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence
	Friday	Telephone conference team meeting
Week 1	Monday	Off-site evaluation of evidence
	Tuesday ¹⁹	Full team on site gathering evidence
	Wednesday	Full team on site gathering evidence and providing feedback

104. A focused visit will look at one or more aspects of service, themes or cohorts of children. Inspections will use evaluation criteria from this framework or from our JTAIs.

105. We will make the final decision about the focused visit topic to be covered. The decision will be based on one or more of the following:

- a specific area of service that has been identified in a local authority as an example of good or outstanding practice
- a specific area of service that has been identified as one that needs to improve or an area where themes, trends and issues are identified

¹⁸ Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) carry out these visits under section 136 (2) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA). Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has the power to carry out inspections of local authority children's services functions as listed in section 135 of the EIA.

¹⁹ Some focused visits may take place on Wednesday and Thursday. All other milestones will be adjusted by one day to reflect this.

- agreement between us and the local authority that a specific focus will support that local authority's improvement journey
- we decide to undertake a short programme in a particular area of service, which will then lead to a thematic overview.

Focused visit topics

106. Each focused visit will cover part of the scope of standard and short inspections. Leadership is a feature of all focused visits principally through the lens of the impact of leaders on practice with children and families.

- The front door – the service that receives contacts and referrals (single or multi-agency) where decisions are made about:
 - child protection enquiries – strategy discussions, section 47 enquires, etc.
 - emergency action – liaison with police to use powers of protection, applications for emergency protection order
 - child in need assessments
 - decisions to accommodate
 - step-up from and step-down to early help
 - no further action/sign-posting.
- Children in need and those subject to a child protection plan:
 - thresholds
 - step-up/step-down between children in need and child protection
 - children on the edge of care
 - children subject to letter before proceedings and the quality and impact of pre-proceedings interventions
 - children in need at risk of family breakdown
 - the quality of decisions about entering care
 - protection of disabled children.
- Protection of vulnerable adolescents (contextual safeguarding):
 - child sexual/criminal exploitation
 - missing from home, care or education
 - risks associated with gangs
 - risks associated with radicalisation
 - trafficking and modern slavery.
- Children in care:
 - quality of matching, placement and decision making for children in care

- the experiences and progress of disabled children in care.
- Planning and achieving permanence:
 - return to birth family
 - connected (family and friends) care
 - adoption
 - long-term foster or residential care
 - special guardianship.
- Care leavers:
 - care leavers aged 16 and 17
 - care leavers aged 18 to 25
 - accommodation
 - employment, education and training
 - transition to adulthood
 - staying close and in touch.

107. In each of these focused visits, inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of:

- performance management
- management oversight
- supervision
- quality assurance
- continuous professional development of the workforce.

Findings at focused visits

108. Inspectors will not make graded judgements at the outcome of a focused visit. Nor will they indicate what the grade may have been if the visit had been a short or standard inspection. The outcome will be findings about strengths and areas for improvement, reported in a published letter.

109. Where inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will identify areas for priority action. An area for priority action is either:

- an area of serious weakness that is placing children at risk of inadequate protection and significant harm
- or
- unnecessary delay in identifying permanent solutions for children in care that results in their welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

110. Priority actions may result from particular or localised failings to protect or care for children as well as from systemic failures or deficits. Some examples of areas for priority action are:

- unrecognised or unallocated children's cases and/or significant delays in addressing child protection concerns or safeguarding the welfare of a child in care
- systemic failure or significant weakness in practice that either expose children to significant risk of harm or fail to safeguard and promote the child's welfare
- a significant shortfall in capacity (front-line staffing numbers, qualifications and expertise) or deficit in management oversight and supervision that impacts adversely on delivery of help, protection or care to children
- significant delays in the allocation or assessment of a large number of children in need cases that expose those children to potential and unquantified risk of harm.

111. Inspectors will use findings from focused visits when planning their next short or standard inspection. The evidence from a focused visit will not be used as primary evidence, but may enable inspectors to target their evidence gathering more effectively.

Monitoring inadequate local authorities

The arrangements for monitoring the progress of inadequate local authority children's services.

Notifying the local authority of monitoring activity

112. If local authority children's services are judged inadequate, we will carry out monitoring activity that includes an action planning visit, quarterly monitoring visits and a re-inspection. The lead inspector will inform the DCS of this at the feedback meeting for the inspection where the inadequate judgement is given.
113. If a local authority is not prepared to agree the programme of quarterly monitoring visits, the Secretary of State is likely to intervene and direct us to carry out these visits.²⁰
114. These activities may also take place if inspectors identify areas for priority action at a JTAI that suggest that children are at risk of significant harm.
115. Monitoring visits will focus on where improvement is needed the most. Inspectors will monitor and report on the local authority's progress since the

²⁰ Section 118(2) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 enables the Secretary of State to direct the Chief Inspector to carry out an inspection of a local authority children's services.

inspection. Inspectors will also check that performance in other areas has not declined since the inspection. If new concerns emerge, inspectors are likely to look at these on the monitoring visits.

Action planning visit following an inadequate judgement

116. At the inspection feedback meeting, the lead inspector will ask the DCS to arrange an action planning visit. The visit should take place about 30 working days after the local authority has received its inspection report.
117. The purpose of the visit is to:
 - clarify the roles, responsibilities and activities of Ofsted and the DfE
 - help the local authority and their partners understand the inspection findings so that they can develop an action plan
 - set out the implications for statutory partners, including those included in the local strategic safeguarding arrangements
 - discuss the draft action plan (if available)
 - confirm the date of the first monitoring visit and establish the pattern of future monitoring activity
 - agree the focus of the first monitoring visit and (if possible) any subsequent monitoring visits.
118. Once the local authority has received their inspection report, the regional director will write to the DCS confirming the action planning visit. They will copy this letter to the DfE inspections and interventions team.
119. A member of the inspection team, usually the lead inspector, and a senior HMI based in the local authority's region will attend the visit. The role of the inspector and senior HMI is to help the local authority understand the findings from the inspection.
120. The DCS will decide who else attends the action planning visit. The DCS may wish to discuss this with the lead inspector to ensure that attendees are appropriate to the recommendations in the report. The attendees will usually include senior managers of the local authority children's services and other key partners. The visit is concerned with the operational work of children's services professionals, so elected councillors will not normally attend.
121. The senior HMI and lead inspector will discuss the agenda for the action planning visit with the DCS before the event. The lead inspector will circulate the final agenda five working days before the visit.
122. If the local authority has a draft of their action plan, the DCS should share this with the lead inspector before the action planning visit. Early drafts of action plans are accepted as a 'work in progress' and will not be formally reviewed by the inspector.

123. The lead inspector will record the outcome of the discussions. The SHMI will send this to the DCS, regional director and the national director (social care).

Reviewing the local authority action plan

124. The lead inspector will review the action plan as soon as possible after receiving it. We are not responsible for 'signing off' or endorsing the action plan – this is the responsibility of the DCS. Our role is to advise the DCS about whether the action plan reflects the recommendations in the inspection report. Our regional director will write to the DCS confirming whether the action plan reflects the inspection findings.
125. If the regional director thinks that the action plan does not respond to the recommendations set out in the inspection report, the lead inspector and/or senior HMI will discuss this with the DCS. If we and the local authority disagree on this matter, the regional director will write to the DCS setting out the area(s) of difference and the reasons.
126. The lead inspector will share the letter they send to the DCS with the DfE inspections and interventions unit. If we and the local authority differ in our view of the action plan, we will ask the Secretary of State to consider what action (if any) they want the DfE to take.
127. With the agreement of the DCS, the inspector and/or senior HMI may attend the local authority's improvement board or other related meetings, for example with DfE officials. Our inspectors will attend as observers.

Arrangements for monitoring visits

128. At the action planning visit, the senior HMI, lead inspector and DCS will agree arrangements for the quarterly monitoring visits. The monitoring visits may not be equally spaced throughout the year. The first monitoring visit will usually be within four weeks of the submission deadline for the local authority's action plan. We will usually carry out between four and six monitoring visits before a re-inspection. The lead inspector will confirm the dates of the visits in advance.
129. Usually, two inspectors will carry out each visit. Each visit will usually last for two days. Wherever possible, the same inspector will lead all the monitoring visits in the same local authority.

Ten days before the visit	Monday	Lead inspector requests child-level data
Nine days before the visit	Tuesday	Local authority provides data, indicating which cases they have audited
Eight days before the visit	Wednesday	Lead inspector notifies local authority of specific audited cases the local authority should share

The week before the visit	Wednesday	Local authority shares audited cases
	Thursday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence
	Friday	Telephone conference team meeting
Inspectors onsite	Monday	Off-site evaluation of evidence
	Tuesday ²¹	Full team on site gathering evidence
	Wednesday	Full team on site gathering evidence and providing feedback

Before a monitoring visit

130. Two weeks before the visit, the lead inspector will ask the local authority to provide up-to-date child-level data. When providing the data, the local authority should indicate any cases that they have audited since the last monitoring visit.
131. The inspector may ask the local authority to audit cases. Usually, the inspector will request information about up to six cases that have already been audited by the local authority. The local authority should share the completed audits at least three working days before the monitoring visit.
132. We will only request information that is necessary to inform that monitoring visit. Requests will be based on an extract of the information we request for our inspections of local authority children's services (Annex A).
133. Inspectors will provide details for accessing a secure online site that the local authority can use to share this information.

On-site activity in monitoring visits

134. The lead inspector and DCS will agree a timetable for the on-site activity. On-site activity will usually consist of evaluating the experience of up to six children and young people. Inspectors will evaluate the cases audited by the local authority to see how effective the local authority's auditing systems are.
135. To triangulate their findings, inspectors will look at a sample of other cases. Any sampling activity will be proportionate to the practice that inspectors are evaluating. Inspectors will usually only sample cases from the previous three months.
136. If the inspector identifies a cause for concern about the help, protection or care given to a child or children, they must bring it to the DCS's attention.

²¹ Some monitoring visits may take place on Wednesday and Thursday. All other milestones will be adjusted by one day to reflect this.

137. Inspectors will record the evidence collected and their conclusions during each monitoring visit. Inspectors must record the case numbers of tracked and sampled cases so that these can be cross-referenced in future visits.
138. At the end of each visit, the lead inspector will feed back a summary of the inspection findings to the DCS, chief executive and commissioner (where one is appointed). The Ofsted regional director and/or quality assurance manager may be present for the feedback. If the authority and inspectors disagree about the findings, this must be recorded.
139. The lead inspector and the local authority will discuss the areas to consider at the next monitoring visit. If the date of the next monitoring visit is known, the lead inspector will confirm the milestones for the local authority to provide information and whether it will need to audit any cases.

Roles and expectations of inspectors

The things inspectors should do when working as part of an inspection team.

140. In all inspections, all inspectors work collaboratively on all aspects of the scope to ensure that evidence is analysed as a group activity. In short and standard inspections, all inspectors usually gather evidence and evaluate the same cohort of children's experiences and progress at the same time. This is central to the effectiveness of a small team.
141. The lead inspector will:
 - coordinate the inspection between the team and with the local authority area leaders
 - challenge, support and give advice to the team and quality assure their work
 - develop lines of enquiry alongside the team
 - prioritise inspection activity according to lines of enquiry
 - consider any health and safety risks for individual inspectors.
142. The team inspector will:
 - work across judgement areas to provide challenge and scrutiny to the work of other inspectors throughout the inspection and in the final judgement meeting
 - present succinct analysis of the main findings based on reliable evidence
 - quality assure their own and other inspectors' work during inspections.

Inspection team meetings

143. Team meetings are important to ensure that the team covers the scope of the inspection. Inspectors should come together at the beginning, middle and end of each fieldwork day to:
- share and triangulate their evidence and analysis
 - agree and record shared findings in their joint evidence record
 - develop and close down lines of enquiry as a team
 - build up an evidence-based view of the quality and impact of practice and leadership within the local authority area
 - keep the lead inspector fully aware of any key developments
 - enable the lead to coordinate the inspection effectively.
144. The team will meet for an extended period on the penultimate day onsite to discuss findings, agree provisional judgements and identify areas for improvement.

Inspection methodology

The things that inspectors will do to gather and evaluate evidence and report their findings.

Inspection activity and gathering evidence

145. Almost all inspection evidence will be gathered by looking at individual children and young people's experiences. This will be largely through meeting with practitioners to understand the nature and impact of their work with children and families, including scrutinising electronic records.
146. We take into account individual children's starting points and circumstances during inspections. We recognise that even slight progress in a particular aspect of their lives may represent a significant improvement for some children. We also recognise that for some children, because of their experiences of trauma, abuse or neglect, progress is not always straightforward. Progress in one area may result in deterioration in another as they work through the impact of their past experiences.
147. Evaluating individual children's records that have already been audited by the local authority is an effective way for inspectors to understand the local authority and target their evidence gathering. If the local authority's evaluation of practice is in line with our evaluation, this will usually reduce the need for further primary evidence in that part of the inspection.
148. When evaluating individual children's experiences, inspectors will **not** grade individual pieces of work.

149. Where statutory functions have been delegated, the inspectors will evaluate the experiences of children and young people in the same way as they do in areas where functions have not been delegated.²²
150. When inspectors select the children and young people whose experiences they will evaluate, they will take into account the factors set out below:
- age, gender, disability and ethnicity
 - children at risk of harm from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. Inspectors will also want to identify those children and young people who the local authority is concerned may be vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation and those children and young people who have been missing from care, home and education. These children must be part of the cohort of children whose experiences inspectors evaluate
 - educational achievement and ability
 - type of placement, including out-of-area placements, kinship care or 'connected person' arrangement and children placed at home and subject to a care order²³
 - at least one child from a large sibling group
 - children and young people supported by a third party provider operating with social services functions delegated to it by the local authority.²⁴
151. The lead inspector will take into account any lines of enquiry identified before arriving on site or particular children and young people who are identified through the sample information, such as children who appear to have experienced significant delay.
152. It is important that inspectors examine good practice as part of the inspection. We encourage local authorities to provide examples of cases that demonstrate good practice that it has identified through local case audit activity.
153. In evaluating children and young people's experiences, inspectors will test the following thresholds:
- early help – including early help assessments
 - referral and assessment
 - children in need
 - child protection (for investigation and for a plan)

²² For further information on delegated functions see the section on alternative delivery models.

²³ Regulation 24(3) Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010.

²⁴ Where the local authority has delegated functions to such a provider of social work services. For further information on delegated functions, see the section in this framework on alternative delivery models.

- continuing help and support for families
- the decision to accommodate
- the decision to remove
- permanence planning
- matching and placement decisions, including work to support return home
- leaving care.

154. In all inspections where the child's journey is looked at retrospectively, inspectors will base their judgements on contemporary practice.²⁵ Judgements will generally be based on practice that has an impact on the child's or young person's current situation, although inspectors will read some historical information to understand the child's journey, their progress and how this relates to the plans for their future.
155. Where case files are wholly or partly electronic, the local authority should arrange for each inspector to have individual access to all relevant electronic systems. During the course of case file reading, inspectors must return any paper case files when they are needed by the staff working with the child and/or family.
156. Inspectors will review a sample of supervision records and carers' records (where appropriate), including those related to the sample of children and young people.

Protecting personal data

157. During inspections and visits, inspectors will gather personal information that is necessary to help them evaluate local services. Our privacy notices set out what data we collect, what we do with it, how long we keep it for and people's rights under the Data Protection Act 2018.²⁶

Hearing the views of children and young people and their families

158. There are various opportunities to hear the views of children, young people and their families. Inspectors will use these whenever possible. These include:
- direct testimony, for example speaking to those whose cases we are looking at closely

²⁵ This is practice usually not longer than six months prior to the inspection. Inspectors may need to evaluate practice prior to this to understand a child's journey.

²⁶ Ofsted privacy notice for inspections of local authority children's services;
www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-privacy-notices/social-care-ofsted-privacy-notice#local-authority-childrens-services

- views of representative groups – for example from the Children in Care Council
 - views expressed by others advocating for children in care and care leavers, including foster carers and residential staff
 - views directly recorded in case files and meeting minutes
 - views expressed by practitioners
 - views expressed by others advocating for children, young people and their families
 - analysis of the annual questionnaires, including those from children in care, carers, social workers and stakeholders
 - reviewing complaints made by children.
159. Inspectors will talk to children and young people whenever possible during the inspection, although these discussions will not always be face to face. When talking to or about children or young people, inspectors are interested in hearing how the children and young people's rights are being considered, how their entitlements are realised and about their experiences of the local pledges or charters in practice.
160. Inspectors will provide the local authority with guidance to help prepare children, young people, carers and families to be involved in the inspection. Inspectors must make sure that children and young people and their families understand what their involvement in the inspection means before speaking with them about their experiences. We have published two documents with this [framework](#) to help local authorities and inspectors explain to children and their families what their involvement in inspections and visits means.
161. Inspectors will discuss any risks or ethical issues concerned with meeting children and birth family members with the child's social worker or lead practitioner.
162. Inspectors will work with agencies to ensure that any child or young person with communication difficulties has access to the necessary support to facilitate her/his full involvement in the inspection.
163. We will also want to see and hear the impact of local consultation with all children and young people. This includes children in care, care leavers, carers and birth families. We will want to see how their feedback has been asked for, both individually and collectively, and taken into account to improve practice and services.
164. During a standard or short inspection, an inspector may meet with a group of foster carers, either an established group or a group identified through an open invitation to meet the inspection team.

Documentation

165. The inspection team will review the documentation requested in Annex A. If the local authority wants to share any additional information after it has provided Annex A, they must discuss this with the lead inspector first. The local authority must be clear why it believes the information is relevant to the inspection. The lead inspector will make the final decision about whether to accept the information as part of the inspection evidence.

Where inspectors are seeking further information

166. We sometimes have to ask for further information. This may be about a service or strategy or about an individual child's experiences.
167. Requests for further information about an individual child's experiences should not be seen as a negative. Sometimes it is because inspectors have insufficient information to know that a child is safe and it may appear that the child is at risk of harm. For example, because they cannot find the information or because it has not been recorded by the local authority. After the local authority senior leadership team has responded to the request, inspectors are able to make a more informed judgement about the quality and impact of the practice they have seen. In some cases, requests for further information enable inspectors to explore good practice.
168. At the start of the inspection, the lead inspector will set up a record of requests for further information (Annex B) and share this with the DCS. The lead inspector will ask the DCS to enter responses to a request for information on the record.

Engaging with leaders and staff

Interviews with practitioners, managers and stakeholders

169. Inspectors will triangulate evidence by talking to practitioners and/or managers, either by telephone or in person. Where children and young people are supported by a third party provider as the result of statutory functions being delegated, inspectors will talk to the practitioners and managers of that provider in the same way as they would to local authority staff. Lead inspectors will only request that groups of people are brought together for discussions or meetings where this is the only way to triangulate evidence and is based on lines of enquiry arising from case evaluations.
170. When talking to social workers about practice, inspectors are likely to ask questions about a range of issues, for example:
- the quality and impact of supervision and management oversight
 - the ways in which they are helped to strengthen families and minimise risk
 - workloads and workload management

- the availability, quality and impact of training and development opportunities
- the impact on practice through multi-agency training and the dissemination of learning from national or local learning reviews.

Inspectors will usually speak about these issues alone with social workers. They may ask for the social worker's line manager to be present.

171. Where these individuals are not available, inspectors may talk to those who are deputising for them in their absence.
172. Where local authorities are in a process of reform or implementing an improvement plan, the lead inspector will ensure that the impact of these changes is evaluated throughout the inspection and discussed with the senior managers. This is likely to be reflected in the report, particularly the impact of leaders on frontline social work practice judgement.
173. If, as part of the assessment of the impact of leadership on social work practice with children and families, inspectors identify an issue arising from the arrangements for discharging the functions of the DCS and lead member for children's services, they will look at the quality and effectiveness of the local authority's assurance and compliance process.

Engaging the DCS during an inspection/visit

174. The lead inspector will inform the DCS or another member of the senior staff of emerging findings throughout the inspection/visit. This is likely to be on a daily basis through a brief face-to-face meeting, which may involve other inspectors from the team. This gives the local authority the opportunity to challenge and understand emerging findings. In a large local authority where the inspection team is working at different locations on different days, the lead inspector may ask the DCS to travel to that location for the daily meeting or be in touch by telephone or video conference.
175. These meetings will be short and focus on the main findings arising from the inspection. They will not be a description of all the inspection activity. The lead inspector should check that the DCS is clear about the relationship between the evidence and the emerging and/or substantiated findings.
176. Although the lead inspector will always offer the DCS opportunities for engagement, the DCS may choose whether or not to accept. For example, they may not be available to meet with the lead inspector due to other commitments. The extent to which the DCS engages with the inspection team will not, in itself, influence inspection judgements.

Local family justice system

177. In evaluating services for children subject to care, supervision and adoption proceedings, it is important to understand local authority performance in the

context of the local family justice system and to gather a wide range of valuable evidence, particularly in reviewing the child's journey on coming into care and plans for permanence. Inspectors may contact the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) to hear their experience of local authority performance and get their perspective on the local family justice system.

178. Inspectors may, in some circumstances, decide to speak with the local judiciary (likely to be the local designated family judge and/or the chair of the family proceedings court bench) and/or court administration (court manager, family court listing officer or clerk to the family justices). Interviews will usually be by telephone.
179. We will not make judgements about family justice partner organisations or the judiciary in the report, but may report system-wide strengths and weaknesses.
180. The range of information gathering will vary according to the lines of enquiry in each area and will be proportionate.
181. Contact with the local Cafcass service area will add to the evidence base. Cafcass may have information about:
 - response to referrals and requests for information
 - the appropriateness of thresholds for care applications and timeliness of applications
 - level and appropriateness of applications for section 25 secure orders and emergency protection orders
 - the quality of the local authority's pre-proceeding work within the Public Law Outline
 - timeliness and quality of assessments and reports to court, including quality assurance processes
 - the effectiveness of independent reviewing officers
 - the local authority's engagement with the Local Family Justice Board
 - the involvement of Cafcass in the local safeguarding arrangements and their effectiveness
 - the appropriate allocation of requests for section 7 reports to Cafcass or the local authority²⁷

²⁷ When a court is considering any question with respect to a child under the Children Act 1989 it can 'ask' (a) a Cafcass officer or (b) a local authority to report to the court. These often relate to questions of where a child should live or with whom they should have contact with in circumstances where parents are divorcing or separating. A national protocol (*Protocol for allocating responsibilities for court reporting in private law Children Act 1989 proceedings between Cafcass and local authority children's services*; <http://adcs.org.uk/download/position-statements/aug-10/adcs-cafcass-protocol->

- the quality of the local authority's legal advice and representation.

Recording evidence

182. Throughout the inspection/visit, each inspector will maintain contemporaneous records of the evidence obtained from all aspects of the inspection. Inspectors may use an electronic evidence gathering system to do this. Quality assurance managers may scrutinise this evidence and it will be considered in the event of any complaint. Inspectors must keep any written evidence provided by the local authority if it is essential to the inspection and has not already been stored electronically on our information systems.
183. Records of evidence should be clear and inspectors must record the source, date and time of when they collected it. Records of evidence should be outcome-focused, evaluative and clearly linked to the evaluation criteria headings.

Electronic evidence

184. On a regular basis throughout the day, as soon as they can after observations or meetings, inspectors should write short evaluative summaries of practice in the inspection team's aggregate electronic evidence record. Most of the electronic summaries should be of the team's joint and shared analysis. Individual summaries are required in the electronic evidence record if serious concerns about the safety and welfare of a child are identified or good practice identified.
185. Electronic evidence record entries should be evaluative, expressing clearly the inspection team's view about the quality and effectiveness of practice, rather than simply describing what practice is in place.
186. Inspectors must maintain the electronic evidence record that becomes part of the shared evidence for the inspection. The detailed evidence is held in their contemporaneous notes. The electronic evidence record is a summary of the inspectors' evaluation. Summaries may relate to more than one source of evidence or more than one case.
187. The lead inspector will coordinate completion of the electronic evidence record, with scrutiny and challenge by the quality assurance manager. All inspectors will contribute to and review the record. They should identify gaps and completed lines of enquiry at an early stage and discuss these regularly with the lead inspector.

[for-allocation-reponsibilities-final-august-2010.pdf](#)) states that if the child is an open case to a local authority or a closed case of less than a month, the report should be prepared by the local authority.

188. Electronic evidence record summaries should be made following team meetings or at the end of the day. This will ensure that the electronic evidence record remains up to date throughout the inspection and that the feedback meeting is informed by up-to-date analysis of the evidence. All findings must be supported by the electronic evidence record and inspectors' contemporaneous notes.
189. Evidence records should quantify the extent of the practice inspectors are evaluating. Volume is less important than the quality of the evidence record. A three-part structure for electronic evidence record entries can help to achieve this:
 - start with an overall evaluative statement about the aspect of practice being considered
 - briefly summarise the evidence underpinning this statement
 - end with a comment on the consequences for children and young people – the impact.

This will help to ensure that the impact of inspection findings is clear, both to inform judgements and in the final report.

190. The electronic evidence record must include analyses of findings agreed at team meetings. It must identify any areas of significant concern or outstanding practice.
191. The quality assurance manager will add a note to the electronic evidence record when they have reviewed it. These entries will include the quality assurance manager's analysis of the electronic evidence record. This may include recommending areas for further investigation by the inspection team.
192. Inspectors should not use the names of individual children, young people or family members in their evidence records. They should use case reference numbers and/or initials. Inspectors should use job titles or roles for individual staff or practitioners.
193. We will retain notebooks and the electronic evidence record in accordance with our retention policy.

Finalising evidence

194. Towards the end of the inspection or focused visit, the inspection team will complete its inspection activities and inspectors will meet to agree their findings and judgements. This meeting should be informed by clear and aligned evaluation of the evidence.
195. Inspectors will weigh the evidence against the evaluation criteria. At a standard or short inspection, inspectors will make a judgement of good if the characteristics set out in the framework are widespread and common practice and are demonstrably leading to improved outcomes. Inspectors will use their

professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings. They will make a judgement of good where the inspection team concludes that the evidence overall sits most appropriately with a finding of good. This is what we describes as 'best fit'.

196. At the end of a focused visit, the team will agree the main strengths and areas for improvement and whether there are any priority actions.
197. Before formal feedback at the end of a standard or short inspection, the lead inspector and quality assurance manager will usually discuss the main findings from the inspection with the DCS.

Feedback at the end of the inspection/visit

198. On the final day on site, the lead inspector will invite the DCS and senior leaders to meet with the inspection team to hear the provisional findings and/or judgements and, most importantly, the evidence that supports them. The meeting should encourage dialogue between the inspection team and the local authority about this evidence. Because the strengths and areas for development should have been discussed in the daily meetings, there should be no surprises on the final day. In short and standard inspections, the lead inspector will inform the DCS of the provisional judgements before the meeting.
199. Senior leaders are invited to engage in this final discussion about the evidence supporting the provisional findings and/or judgements in order to:
 - understand the evidence that the team used to reach findings and/or judgements to support improvement, including being clear for a local authority judged to be good, what the factors are that keep it from being outstanding
 - participate in a dialogue about the areas for development that are likely to follow the inspection and to ensure that senior leaders fully understand the issues that have been identified
 - understand what will make the most difference for the individual local authority and the children, young people and families that it serves
 - support understanding of the evidence so that the findings and/or judgements of the inspection can be disseminated accurately and inform internal discussions about improvement.
200. To make findings and/or judgements clear and to inform the discussion with the local authority, inspectors should share their analysed, prioritised and themed summary evidence. They will highlight strengths and areas for development across the scope of the inspection/visit. This should not be a scripted presentation and the inspection team will not have produced the final report or letter at this stage. The meeting should usually last no longer than 60 minutes.

201. The lead inspector will outline the team's final findings and/or judgements. Members of the inspection team will then describe to the local authority the key evidence that supports their findings and/or judgements and the areas they have debated. They will invite discussion about what this means. The discussion should relate to the scope of the inspection/visit and be focused on the experience of children and young people through evidenced examples.
202. At the feedback meeting, the lead inspector will set-out the procedures for sharing the draft report/letter for factual accuracy checks, publishing the report/letter and for making a complaint.

Inspection reports and letters

203. The following table sets out the kind of report we publish after each type of inspection or visit:

Standard inspection	Short inspection	Focused visit	Monitoring visit
Inspection report with judgements on the Ofsted four-point scale Plus a stand-alone summary written for children and young people	Inspection report with judgements on the Ofsted four-point scale Plus a stand-alone summary written for children and young people	Letter setting out narrative findings about strengths and areas to improve	Letter setting out narrative findings about strengths and areas to improve We do not usually publish a letter after the first monitoring visit. ²⁸

204. The lead inspector will write the inspection report/letter. The lead inspector is responsible for collating all the information into a final report following fieldwork and is accountable for its quality and integrity.

205. Reports/letters should:

- be concise, evaluative documents, written in clear, straightforward language and free of jargon
- be a fair and accurate reflection of the local area being inspected, with text, balance and tone that reflect the quality of children's experiences
- be written so that they highlight good and outstanding practice and identify clear areas of strength and improvement for the local authority
- strike a balance between being accessible to a wider audience and being of value to the local authority
- be sufficiently clear, precise and detailed about areas that need to improve so the local authority has a basis for subsequent action to lead to improvement.

Sections in the report/letter

206. The first page of the report for a standard or short inspection will include the graded judgements and a brief summary that answers these questions:

- What do we know about the overall experiences of children living in this local authority?
- To what extent do leaders know about the quality of front-line practice?

²⁸ Unless this is the second set of monitoring visits for a local authority.

- How well do they support practice to help it stay or become good?
- What has changed for children since the last inspection?

207. The report will then identify areas where improvement is needed most. The rest of the report will include a section on each of the judgement areas.
208. Letters following focused visits will set out the findings from the visit. The letter may identify a small number of areas where improvement is needed most in relation to the practice inspectors looked at. If inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will include a section that identifies areas for priority action. If inspectors identify an area for priority action, the letter will be subject to additional moderation. If this will affect the factual accuracy check and publication milestones, we will write to the DCS to confirm this.
209. After a monitoring visit, the inspector will write a brief report about their findings and, in particular, their evaluation of the local authority's progress.

Summary for children and young people

210. After each standard and short inspection, we will provide a summary of the inspection findings for children and young people. This will be a separate document from the main report.
211. We will not publish this summary. We will send it to the local authority at the same time that we send the pre-publication version of the main report. It will be for the local authority to decide how best to share this summary with the children and young people they help, protect and care for.

Writing the report/letter

212. When identifying the things that need to improve most, these must be proportionate to the overall grade in inspection reports and to the findings in letters. This section of the report/letter must help the local authority fully understand the areas of the service where improvement is needed most to ensure that children receive or continue to receive a good or better service. We will set out the area of service or practice that needs to improve but will not make a recommendation as to how the local authority should remedy this issue.
213. In the rest of the report/letter, inspectors will only report the main strengths and areas that need to improve. Standard and short inspection reports do not need to report on every aspect of what has been inspected. If a particular issue is not mentioned, this will be because it was neither a strength nor an area in need of improvement.
214. Inspectors must make clear the extent of all the issues reported and the experience that children and young people have and the progress they make. The report must outline the local authority's knowledge about these children and the effectiveness of its response. If any specific group of children is particularly affected – such as those from a specific age, community or ethnic

group, disabled children or those with a specific placement type (for example, fostered children) – this should be included in the report. On short and standard inspections, we will always report findings about the experiences and progress of care leavers.

215. Reports following a standard or short inspection should be no more than 10 pages.
216. If children and young people are supported by a third party provider operating under delegated functions, strengths and areas for improvement must include the extent to which the local authority assures itself of the effectiveness of help, protection and care given to children, young people, families and carers, including the effectiveness of the contract management and quality assurance arrangements.²⁹

Clearing and publishing inspection reports and letters

217. The quality assurance manager allocated to the inspection will review the report/letter and support the lead inspector throughout the report writing process. Our regional director and/or national director, social care, will review all reports.
218. Local authorities will be given an opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the report/letter before we publish it.
219. We will send the final version of the report to the local authority (copied to a third party where statutory functions have been delegated) and to the Chair of Children in Care Council and/or the worker who supports the council. We will also send it to the DfE. We will publish the final version on our website.

	Standard and short inspections	Focused visits and monitoring visits
Report sent to local authority for factual accuracy checks	10 days after inspectors complete fieldwork	5 days after inspectors complete fieldwork
Number of days the local authority has to return their factual accuracy comments	3 days	2 days
Final version sent to the local authority (pre-publication, under embargo)	18 days after inspectors complete fieldwork	14 days after inspectors complete fieldwork

²⁹ The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (Relevant Care Functions) (England) Regulations 2014; www.legislation.gov.uk/id/uksi/2014/2407

Report published on Ofsted's website	21 days after inspectors complete fieldwork	16 days after inspectors complete fieldwork
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Quality assurance

220. The principles of quality assurance for all inspections, focused visits and monitoring visits are based on the assumption that the lead inspector owns the inspection and the final report.
221. Quality assurance arrangements will be flexible and proportionate depending on the type of inspection activity undertaken. The level of quality assurance will be influenced by:
- whether it is an inspection resulting in a judgement or a visit resulting in a letter
 - the experience of the team
 - the influencing factors of the local authority, including size and location
 - local intelligence held by us.

After the inspection

Information about submitting an action plan in response to an inspection and making a complaint to us about the inspection.

Action plan after an inspection or visit

222. After a standard or short inspection, the local authority should write an action plan that responds to the findings in the report. They must submit their action plan to us at ProtectionOfChildren@ofsted.gov.uk within 70 working days of receiving the final inspection report.³⁰
223. Following a focused visit, updating the existing action plan from the previous inspection will be deemed sufficient for Ofsted and the DfE's purposes. The local authority should send the updated action plan to us when they share their self-evaluation in preparation for the next annual engagement meeting.
224. If a focused visit results in an area for priority action, the local authority should submit an action plan that responds to this as soon as possible and within 70 working days of receiving the final focused visit letter.
225. The local authority does not need to submit an action plan to us after a monitoring visit.

³⁰ The requirement for this is set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007; www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/462/contents/made.

Complaints

226. Most of our work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns arise during an inspection, these should be raised with the lead inspector or quality assurance manager as soon as possible during the inspection visit. This provides an opportunity to resolve the matter before the inspection is completed. Any concerns about the factual accuracy of the findings in the report can be raised after the inspection and will be considered as part of the quality assurance process.
227. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a formal complaint can be raised under our complaints procedure:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted.

Sharing information with other inspectorates

228. We share the final version of our local authority reports with our partner inspectorates under embargo until the report is published.³¹ If there is evidence of significant concerns relating to the practice of other agencies, we will write to the relevant inspectorate setting out the concerns in the report and our advice that they may wish to investigate under their powers. There may be occasions when, due to the serious nature of the concern, we will share information with other inspectorates during the inspection.
229. It is the responsibility of the lead inspector to draft and submit letters to partner chief inspectors at the same time that the draft inspection report is submitted for quality assurance.
230. If inspection evidence suggests that there are weaknesses in practice in other providers or agencies that we regulate or inspect, inspectors will record this and it will inform future inspections of those providers/agencies.

Alternative delivery models and delegation of local authority functions

Information about how we inspect and report where a local authority delivers services through a third party organisation, for example a Trust.

231. This section provides information about inspections where a local authority has delegated statutory functions to a third party provider – an alternative delivery model.
232. In these circumstances (with the exception of arrangements under section 497A(4AA) of the Education Act 2006), the inspection is still an inspection of

³¹ Our partner inspectorates are the CQC, HMICFRS, HMI Probation, HMI Prisons and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

the local authority. This is because the third party is acting as the local authority's agent.

Local authority functions

233. Under Part 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, local authorities may make arrangements with a body corporate for the discharge of some or all of the local authority's statutory care functions.
234. Relevant care functions are those functions set out in section 1(2) of the CYPA and regulation 3 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (Relevant Care Functions) (England) Regulations 2014. Relevant care functions do not include those functions set out in section 2 of the Children and Young Persons Act. A body corporate that is carried on for profit may not be party to an arrangement for the discharge of a function set out in regulation 3 of the 2014 Regulations.

Direction by the Secretary of State

235. Under section 497A(4) of the Education Act 1996, the Secretary of State may direct a local authority to contract out its social services functions relating to children or transfer those functions to a nominee. At the time of writing, the delegation of functions by local authorities has either been on a voluntary basis (with no direction from the Secretary of State) or under a section 497(4) direction. In both cases, the body operating under the delegation is acting as the agent of the local authority. Any inspection judgement is therefore of the local authority.
236. Where the Secretary of State has given a direction under section 497A(4A), then by virtue of section 497A(4AA), any reference to a local authority is to be read as a reference to the body corporate or person who is exercising the function. If a direction is made under section 497(4A) or (4AA), the inspection is of the nominee or the Secretary of State's exercise of the relevant functions and therefore the judgement will be of that person/body and not the local authority. At the time of writing, there have been no such directions made.

Judgements about leadership where there are alternative delivery models

237. If a local authority makes arrangements with a third party provider to discharge functions, that provider is acting as the agent of the local authority. Therefore, inspectors will evaluate their effectiveness using the same evaluation criteria.
238. When applying the criteria, inspectors will consider whether:
- effective contract monitoring arrangements by the local authority are in place to ensure that children receive services that meet their needs
 - the local authority reviews these arrangements regularly to ensure that they remain effective

- the local authority has proportionate scrutiny arrangements in place to ensure that they fulfil their role as the corporate parent
- where the third party provider is responsible for the management of local authority partnerships, the provider is engaged with partner organisations to ensure that their responsibilities are undertaken to a high standard.
- in cases where a local authority has delegated all of its functions to a third party provider, the chief executive or equivalent and the board of that provider discharge the individual and collective responsibilities of local authority leaders (as outlined)
- in cases where only some functions have been delegated, the arrangements for how the local authority holds the provider to account are proportionate to the nature and extent of delegation.

239. All references in the evaluation criteria to a 'local authority' also refer to all arrangements for alternative delivery models.

Action plans where there are alternative delivery models

240. We and the DfE have agreed that the local authority and alternative delivery model (ADM)/trust are responsible for different aspects of any action plans. Our expectations are that:

- arrangements reflect what has already been agreed as part of existing service contract
- the local authority will draft the overarching strategic elements (information taken from any existing services contract) that would include any wider issues which are not the responsibility of the ADM/trust (for example governance, relationship with trust, scrutiny function, support services)
- the ADM/trust should draft the operational content describing how outcomes will be achieved to address our findings
- the local authority is responsible for submitting the plan (copied to the ADM/trust). It must be made clear whether the plan has been agreed and where there is any disagreement, these areas must be set out.

241. Where the ADM/trust has been created at the direction of the Secretary of State, the plan should be copied to the Secretary of State to enable these issues to be addressed through the appropriate route.

Evaluation criteria and grade descriptors

Our description of what a good experience for children and young people looks like. Inspectors use this to make their judgements.

Overall effectiveness

242. Inspectors will determine the overall effectiveness graded judgement by taking account of the grading of the other judgements that have been agreed and

- looking at the extent of good practice across the service
- the extent and impact of any areas for improvement
- where areas for improvement have been identified, the extent to which leaders and managers have a “grip” on the issue.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

243. A local authority is likely to be **judged good** if the following apply:

Early help

- Children, young people and families are offered help when needs and/or concerns are first identified. The early help improves the child’s situation and supports sustainable progress. The interface between early help and statutory work is clearly and effectively differentiated.

Identifying and responding to children’s needs and appropriate thresholds

- Professionals identify children and young people in need of help and protection. They make appropriate referrals to children’s social care and are able to access social work expertise and advice. There is a timely and effective response to referrals, including out of normal office hours.³² Professionals understand thresholds. This leads to children and families receiving effective, proportionate and timely interventions, which improve their situation.

Making good decisions and providing effective help³³

- Children and families experience child protection enquiries that are thorough and lead to timely action, which reduces the risk of harm to children.
- Allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by professionals and carers are taken seriously. Steps are taken to protect children and young

³² This includes referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer

³³ Focused on assessment, planning and review

people and the management of allegations against staff is robust and effective.

- Assessments and plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues and risks. Assessments (including early help assessments) are timely and proportionate to risk. They are informed by research and by the historical context and significant events for each child. They result in direct help for families where needed and are focused on achieving sustainable progress for children. Help given to families is proportionate to the level of need. Information-sharing between agencies and professionals is timely, specific, effective and lawful.
- Children in need of help and/or protection have a plan setting out how they will be helped and how their needs are going to be met and how risk will be reduced within the timescales appropriate for the child. Where families refuse to engage, clear contingency plans are in place. These are based on the assessment of need and risks to the child. Action is taken to avoid drift and delay. Plans and decisions are reviewed. Alternative decisive action is taken where the circumstances for children do not change and the help provided does not meet their needs or the risk of harm or actual harm remains or intensifies.
- Children and young people are protected through effective multi-agency arrangements. Key participants attend multi-agency meetings.³⁴ These meetings are effective forums for timely information-sharing, planning, decision-making and monitoring. Actions happen within agreed timescales and the help and protection provided reduce risk and meet need.

Management oversight of frontline practice

- Decisions are made by suitably qualified and experienced social workers and managers. Actions are clearly recorded. Systematic and high quality management oversight of frontline practice drive child-centred plans and actions within the timescales appropriate for the child. Effective and timely planning, support and decision-making takes place during pre-proceedings work.

Participation and direct work with children and families

- Children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with social workers. They are consistently seen and seen alone by social workers where it is in the best interests of the child. Practice is based on understanding each child's day-to-day lived experience. Children are safer as a result of the help they receive.

³⁴ Case conferences, strategy meetings, core groups and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC)

- Children and young people are listened to. Practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings. Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate. Feedback from children and their families about the effectiveness of the help, care or support they receive informs practice and service development.

Identifying and responding to all types of abuse recognising the vulnerability of specific groups of children.

- Neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse and emotional abuse are effectively identified and responded to. Children and young people who live in households, where at least one parent or carer misuses substances or suffers from mental ill-health or where there is domestic violence, are helped and protected.
- Social workers recognise the factors that can make children more vulnerable and tailor their interventions appropriately. This includes (but not exhaustively) disabled children, children who are privately fostered, children not attending school, vulnerable adolescents and children at risk of radicalisation or exploitation or becoming involved in gangs.
- Children and young people who are missing from home, care or full-time school education (including those who are excluded from school) and those at risk of exploitation and trafficking receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them.³⁵ For those who are missing or often missing, there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm.

Outstanding

- 'The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection' is likely to be judged outstanding if the response to children and families is consistently good or better and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children, young people and their families.

Requires improvement to be good

- 'The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection' is likely to be judged requires improvement if there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. However, the local authority is not yet consistently delivering good help and protection for children, young people and families.

³⁵ The local authority has arrangements in place to identify the number of children not in full-time school education and to respond where there are concerns about their welfare.

Inadequate

- 'The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection' is likely to be judged inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures, which leave children being harmed or at risk of harm.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

244. This area is likely to be judged good if the following apply:

Making good decisions for children

- Children and young people become looked after in a timely manner and in their best interests; decisions that children should be in care are based on clear, effective, comprehensive and risk-based assessments, involving where appropriate other professionals working with the family.
- Where it is not possible for children to return home, suitable and timely plans for permanence are made for them to live away from the family home.
- Where the plan for a child is to return home, there is purposeful work undertaken with the family so that it is safe for the child to return. Further care episodes are avoided unless they are provided as a part of an appropriate plan of support.
- The wishes and feelings of children, and those of their parents, are clearly set out in timely and authoritative assessments and applications to court. Assessments of family members as potential carers are carried out promptly to a good standard.
- Children's care plans comprehensively address their needs and experiences, including the need for timely permanence. Children's plans are robustly and independently reviewed with the involvement, as appropriate, of parents, carers, residential staff and other adults who know them. Plans for their futures continue to be appropriate and ambitious.

Participation and direct work with children in care and care leavers

- Children are seen regularly and seen alone by their social worker and children understand what is happening to them. Children have positive and stable relationships with professionals and carers who are committed to protecting them and promoting their welfare.
- Children in care and care leavers are helped to understand their rights, entitlements and responsibilities. They know how to give feedback or complain and understand what has happened as a result of their complaint. Their complaints are treated seriously and are responded to clearly. Urgent action is taken and services improve where necessary. Children and young people have access to an advocate and independent visitor when needed.

Care leavers are well-informed about access to their records, assistance to find employment, training and financial support.

- The local authority celebrates the achievements of children in care and care leavers. It shows it is ambitious for their futures.
- Children in care and care leavers are well represented by a Children in Care Council or similar body which is regularly consulted on how to improve the support for these children and young people.

Helping and protecting

- Children in care and care leavers are protected or helped to keep themselves safe from bullying, homophobic behaviour and other forms of discrimination.
- Any risks associated with children and care leavers offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, going missing or being sexually exploited or exploited in any other way are known well by the adults who care for them. Children receive help to reduce the risk of harm or actual harm. Children and care leavers are safe and feel safe. They are helped to understand how they can keep themselves safe.

Health

- Children in care and care leavers are in good physical and mental health, or are being helped to improve their health. Their health needs are identified and met.
- Care leavers have access to and understand their full health history.

Learning and enjoyment

- Children and young people make good educational progress at school or other provision since being in care. They receive the same support from their carers as they would from a good parent.
- Children and young people who do not attend school have prompt access to suitable good-quality registered alternative provision. There is regular review of their progress. Urgent action is taken if children are missing from education or if their attendance reduces.
- Children and young people enjoy what they do and have access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities. Adult carers have suitable delegated authority to make prompt decisions about children's day-to-day lives.

Stability and permanence

- Children and young people are safe and settled where they live. They move only in line with care plans, when they are at risk of harm or are being harmed. They do not live anywhere that fails to meet their needs. They are

able to live with their brothers and sisters when this is in their best interests, including when they are adopted. Children and young people have appropriate, carefully assessed and supported contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them.

- Children and care leavers who live away from their 'home' local authority have access to education and health services that meet their needs as soon as they move outside of their 'home' area. Placing local authorities notify the 'receiving' local authority that a child is moving to their area promptly and ensure that services are in place to meet the child's needs before the child moves.
- There is a sufficiently wide range and choice of placements available to meet the needs of children in care.
- Effective recruitment, assessment, training and support of carers (including, as appropriate, foster carers, adopters, special guardians and residential staff) ensure that children and young people receive high-quality, safe and stable care that meets their diverse needs.
- All agencies and professionals work together effectively to reduce any unnecessary delay in receiving support and achieving permanence for children.
- Children are effectively prepared for, and carefully matched with, a permanent placement. Their wishes and feelings influence the decisions about where they live. Children are helped to develop secure, primary attachments with the adults caring for them. They are helped to understand their life histories, experiences and identities.
- The accessibility, style and clarity of case records enhance the understanding that children in care and care leavers have about their histories and experiences.
- Adoption is considered carefully and promptly for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home; this includes good use of concurrent and parallel planning, the Adoption Register and Fostering for Adoption.
- Fostering and adoption panels, and the respective decision-makers, ensure that children are effectively matched with families. Local authorities have arrangements in place to ensure consistently good practice and receive regular feedback on the effectiveness of the work of panels.
- Children who are adopted, their adoptive families, their birth relatives and adopted adults are informed, and are aware of, their entitlement to receive an assessment of their adoption support needs. When support is needed, it is provided quickly, effectively and leads to improved circumstances for the children, young people, families and carers involved.

Care leavers and transitions

- Care leavers have timely, effective pathway plans (including transition planning for children in care with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). These plans address all young people's needs. Reviews of plans for care leavers are robust and involve all key people, including the young person, who understands their pathway plan and contributes to its development. Plans for their future continue to be appropriate, as well as ambitious.
- Care leavers develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful maturity to adulthood, including parenthood. Care leavers have trusted relationships with carers and staff from the local authority and develop supportive relationships within the community, including with family and friends. They receive the right level of practical, emotional and financial support until they are at least 21 and, where necessary, until they are 25.
- Care leavers move towards independence at a pace that is right for them. Young people are encouraged to remain in care until their 18th birthday when this is in their best interest. They can remain living with their carers beyond their 18th birthday or, if more appropriate, receive ongoing support to live in permanent and affordable accommodation that fully meets their needs.
- Care leavers have good education and employment opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships. They are encouraged and supported to continue their education and training, including those aged 21 to 24 years. Care leavers are progressing well and achieving their full potential through either being in further and higher education or in their chosen career/occupation.
- Care leavers have accommodation that best meets their needs and helps them to develop their independence skills safely. Risks of tenancy breakdown are identified and addressed; alternative plans are put in place promptly when necessary. Houses in multiple occupation (HMO) are only used when it is a young person's preferred option and it can demonstrably be shown to be in their best interests.
- Care leavers are provided with all key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults, such as national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.

Outstanding

- 'The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers' is likely to be judged outstanding if the response to children in care and care leavers is consistently good or better and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children in care and care leavers.

Requires improvement to be good

- 'The experiences and progress of children and young people looked after and care leavers and achieving permanence' is judged as requires improvement when there are no widespread or serious failures or unnecessary delays that result in the welfare of children in care or care leavers not being safeguarded and promoted. However, the local authority is not yet consistently delivering good help and care for children in care, and care leavers.

Inadequate

- 'The experiences and progress of children and young people in care and care leavers and achieving permanence' is likely to be inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures, including unnecessary delay in achieving permanence, which result in their welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families³⁶

245. This judgement is likely to be judged good if the following apply:

Strategic leadership

- The leadership of the council, including the chief executive, lead member (and other members) and the Director of Children's Services (DCS) recognise and prioritise the needs of children and this is reflected in corporate decision-making, action and active attendance at key committees and boards.
- The chief executive and lead member are well informed and hold the DCS and their leadership team to account for the quality of practice and the challenges in the local area. This is exemplified through accurate assessments of practice that drive improvement.
- Strategic leaders ensure that relationships with key partners including the health community, the police, schools, Cafcass and the family courts provide a helpful and effective context for social workers and practitioners to work effectively with children and families.
- The local authority is an active, strong and committed corporate parent – in line with the corporate parenting principles.³⁷ There is a corporate sense of responsibility for children in care and care leavers and the chief executive leads a local authority that recognises and prioritises the needs of children in all aspects e.g. housing, career opportunities, education and learning.

³⁶ When reporting it should be clear which tier of management strengths and areas for improvement relate to.

³⁷ Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017

Learning culture

- The local authority has a track record of responding appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies or new demands and shows resilience to new challenges. The local authority's self-evaluation of practice is accurate.
- The local authority has detailed and relevant knowledge of its local communities, including children in care and care leavers and uses this knowledge effectively to meet their needs. Leaders identify the vulnerable groups in their local areas, their needs and ensure that there is an effective response for these groups of children. Commissioned and in-house services have sufficient capacity and meet the needs of local children, young people and families in need of help, care and protection.
- The local authority can demonstrate evidence of practice that is informed and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence about the quality of services. The experiences of children, young people and families who use them are important, including learning from their complaints and from successful or disrupted placements or adoption breakdown.

Performance management

- The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated understanding of its effectiveness and uses this to drive improvement.
- Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and used clearly to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people.

Workforce

- Careful monitoring of workloads and oversight of the impact of wider systems on working conditions for practitioners ensures that they have the capacity and ability to develop meaningful relationships with children and families. The impact of any systems change is well-managed with a sustained focus on the experience of children and families.
- The local authority social care workforce is sufficient, suitably qualified and accredited to deliver high-quality services to children and their families.³⁸ Managers and practitioners are experienced, effectively trained and supervised and the quality of their practice improves the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families. There is effective organisational support for the training and professional development of social workers and managers. Leaders and managers have created an environment where good

³⁸ This will depend on whether the local authority has been through the accreditation process which is planned to be implemented from 2017 to the end of 2020.

social work can flourish and this is evident in the overall quality and impact of social work.

Outstanding

- 'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' is likely to be outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a 'good' judgement, there is evidence that leaders (both professional and political) and managers are confident, ambitious and influential in changing the lives of local children, young people and families, including children in care and those who have left or who are leaving care. They inspire others to change the lives of these children and young people and their families. They innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services, including early help services, for all children and young people. They know their strengths and weaknesses well and both respond to and are resilient to new challenges. Professional relationships between the local authority and partner organisations are mature and well developed. Accountabilities are embedded and result in confident, regular evaluation and improvement of the quality of help, care and protection that is provided.

Requires improvement to be good

- 'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' will be judged as requires improvement when any widespread or serious failures have been identified by the local authority **and** are being effectively addressed, but the characteristics of good leadership are not consistently in place.

Inadequate

- 'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' is likely to be inadequate if either of the two practice judgements is inadequate and leaders and managers have not been able to demonstrate sufficient understanding of the failure. They have been ineffective in prioritising, challenging and making improvements.

Annex A. Information we request from the local authority

246. This annex sets out the information inspectors will ask the local authority to share to support the inspection/visit. The milestones for sharing the information are set out in the table below.
247. We will provide secure means for the local authority to share this information. The lead inspector will provide details when they notify the local authority that the inspection/visit will take place. Guidance on how to share information with us is published on our website with this [framework](#).

	Standard and short inspections	Focused visits	Monitoring visits
	The local authority should provide all the information in Annex A	The local authority should provide only the information relevant to the practice inspectors evaluate at a particular visit. The lead inspector will discuss this with the DCS at the start of the inspection.	
Notification / request for Annex A	5 days before fieldwork (usually Monday)	5 days before fieldwork (usually Tuesday)	10 days before fieldwork (usually Monday)
Child-level data lists	1 day after notification (by the end of Tuesday)	1 day after notification (usually by midday Wednesday)	1 day after notification (usually Tuesday)
Information about audits the local authority has completed in the six months prior to the inspection	1 day after notification (by the end of Tuesday)	1 day after notification (usually by midday Wednesday)	1 day after notification (usually Tuesday)
Information used by the local authority to manage services for children and young people	2 days after notification (by the end of Wednesday)	1 day after notification (usually by the end of Wednesday)	7 days after notification (usually the Wednesday before inspectors are onsite)
Information about specific children's cases	3 days after notification (by the end of Thursday)	2 days after notification (usually by the end of Thursday)	7 days after notification (usually the Wednesday before inspectors are onsite)

248. The lead inspector will make the final decision about whether to request or accept additional information based on whether:

- it is necessary for an accurate understanding of children's experiences and social work practice
- there is already sufficient information on the issue available through other sources in Annex A or primary evidence gathering.

249. The lead inspector will maintain a record of requests for further information (Annex B).

Child-level data

250. When the lead inspector contacts the local authority, she/he will ask for lists containing child-level data. The local authority should provide the child-level data lists as soon as they are able. The table at the start of Annex A sets out expected deadlines for submission. Please provide these lists in Excel.

251. Below is an outline of the broad contents of each list. Further detailed guidance about the fields for each list is available at

www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018

252. To reduce burden on local authorities we have aligned the information within the child-level lists with DfE guidance.³⁹ If possible, please use descriptors and codes in line with the DfE 'common basic data set' and DfE definitions.⁴⁰ If this is not possible, the local authority should provide a description or metadata explaining the codes they use.

253. The child-level data lists we request are:

- List 1: All those who have been the subject of a contact in the three months before inspection.
- List 2: All those who have been the subject of an early help assessment, a common assessment or a targeted intervention in the six months before inspection.
- List 3: All those who have been the subject of a referral in the three months before inspection.

³⁹ Children looked after return 2017 to 2018: guide, October 2017;
www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-looked-after-return-2017-to-2018-guide

Children in need census 2016 to 2017: guide, November 2016;
www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-need-census-2016-to-2017-guide

⁴⁰ Common basic data set (CBDS): database, October 2017;
www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-basic-data-set-cbds-database

- List 4: All those who have been the subject of a statutory assessment in accordance with section 17 or section 47 of the Children Act 1989 in the six months before inspection.
- List 5: All those who have been the subject of a section 47 enquiry in the six months before inspection.
- List 6: All those in receipt of services as a child in need at the point of inspection. Include those who ceased to receive services as a child in need in the three months before inspection.
- List 7: All those who are the subject of a child protection plan at the point of inspection. Include those who ceased to be the subject of a child protection plan in the three months before inspection.
- List 8: All those children in care as at the point of inspection. Include all those children who ceased to be looked after in the six months before inspection.
- List 9: All those care leavers who are receiving leaving care services as at the point of inspection.
- List 10: All those children who have been adopted in the 12 months before inspection, those where the decision that the child should be placed for adoption has been made but they have not yet been adopted, and those who had an adoption decision which was subsequently reversed during the period.
- List 11: All those individuals who in the last 12 months have had contact with the local authority adoption agency by having
 - (a) made an enquiry, received an information pack and attended a follow up interview; and/or
 - (b) had an enquiry or application in progress 12 months ago and have subsequently been approved / rejected; and/or
 - (c) had a child placed with them in the last 12 months.

254. Some children may appear on more than one list. The consistent use of the child ID across the lists will enable the lead inspector to recognise where this occurs.

255. For lists 3 to 10, please provide only one row for each unique child ID where possible. Information should relate to the most recent event (for example: in list 3, the most recent referral; or in list 6, the most recent episode of need).

256. Some of the requested data – particularly in relation to list 1 'contacts' and list 2 'early help assessments' – may not be recorded on the main ICT systems. In these circumstances, the local authority is free to use the solution that suits it best and enables them to provide the data in the timeframe requested. Whatever the format, the data should be clearly identifiable.

257. For list 8, it would assist inspectors to have information about the number of brothers and sisters each child has. This will help them when they select the children whose experiences they will evaluate. The local authority can choose how to provide this information. Two possible options for this are:
- including an extra column in list 8 showing the number of brothers and sisters that each child in care has
 - providing a separate Excel sheet containing each child in list 8 with their unique child ID and the number of brothers and sisters that each child has.
258. If certain data are unavailable, we will ask the local authority to demonstrate how they have sufficient management oversight of the specific issue.
259. After the local authority shares Annex A, we may arrange a brief telephone conversation between an Ofsted analytical officer and a local authority analyst. This is to help us understand the composition and content of the local authority's information and the layout of their management information systems.
260. Queries about the child-level data should be sent to SocialCareSAO@ofsted.gov.uk. However, if you have any queries after you have been notified that an inspection is to take place, please contact the lead inspector.

Local authority audits

261. The local authority should share a list of the audits they have undertaken in the six months before the inspection/visit. The list should identify the child unique ID for those children whose experiences were evaluated, the audit theme and when the audit was completed. If the local authority has an overview report, learning or action plan from the audits, they should share this too.

Case file documents

262. The lead inspector will not ask the local authority to undertake audits specifically for the inspection. Before fieldwork the lead inspector will identify six to 12 cases the local authority has already audited and ask the local authority to provide the audit document for each of these cases. They may ask for other case file documents about these children; for example the most recent assessment, care plan, chronology and supervision record.
263. Inspectors will evaluate these cases during fieldwork. The lead inspector will ask the local authority to speak to the children, young people, parents and carers to see if they are happy to speak to an inspector.

Information the local authority uses to manage its services

264. The lead inspector will ask the local authority to share information it uses to understand and manage its social work practice. The local authority should

share its best and most recent information. The local authority must clearly direct the lead inspector to the relevant documents or sections within them. Where the reasons for sharing a particular piece of information is unclear or the lead inspector decides it is not relevant to the scope of the inspection/visit, inspectors will not read it.

265. The local authority should provide the information below as soon as they are able to and by the deadlines set out at the beginning of Annex A.
266. Each of the topics is numbered. When the local authority shares the information with inspectors, they should include the number in the document name as a prefix. This will enable inspectors to easily identify and retrieve information and support the local authority to link their evidence to the topic.

Impact of leadership on social work practice with children and families

- 1.01 Organisational structure showing lines of reporting and accountability (where relevant, this should include information about structures for alternative delivery models)
- 1.02 The local authority's scheme of delegation, case transfer policy (including step-up/down from or to early help) and any workflow documents/flowcharts that will help inspectors understand how children's social care work is structured
- 1.03 Management information reports that the local authority uses to monitor and improve performance. This should include the most recent monthly/quarterly report/s and the last annual overview document
- 1.04 The local authority's arrangements to gather feedback from children and their families, complaints and serious case reviews and what the local authority has done in response to improve practice
- 1.05 The most recent self-evaluation of social work practice and any peer review or similar external evaluation of practice, undertaken in the last 12 months
- 1.06 A sample of local authority and multi-agency practice audits of work with children in need, at risk of significant harm and those who are looked after or care leavers undertaken in the six months before inspection and any associated improvement/action plans
- 1.07 The workforce profile for social care staff working with children in need, children subject to child protection plans, children in care and care leavers (including: the number of qualified social workers and their post-qualifying 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 by team). This should include information the local authority uses to understand its workforce profile within particular localities, offices or teams.

- 1.08 The workforce development strategy, including the core training and development offer for social workers and their managers and any evaluation of the impact of this undertaken in the last twelve months
- 1.09 Social work caseload and supervision policy
- 1.10 The thresholds/criteria for the provision of services to children at different levels of need
- 1.11 the annual report by the local safeguarding partners
- 1.12 the safeguarding arrangements agreed by the local safeguarding partners
- 1.13 minutes from the last 12 months of meetings of the local safeguarding partners

Children in need of help and protection, including early help

- 2.01 The early help strategy, any associated action plan and relevant management information on the quality, timeliness and impact of the early help provided to children and their families. This should include, as a minimum, the number of early help assessments or similar⁴¹, completed in the last 12 months and the number currently receiving a service through a team around the family (TAF)
- 2.02 Information about children missing from home or care, children suffering or at risk of sexual exploitation and the services these groups of children receive. This should include:
 - the unique ID and dates of birth (where available) for children who have been missing or at risk of sexual exploitation within the last 12 months. This should indicate the current status of these children (care leaver, looked after child, child protection, child in need or not receiving a statutory service) and highlight those that are both missing and at risk of sexual exploitation
 - any child sexual exploitation or missing strategies and associated action plans
 - any workflow documents/flowcharts that will assist inspectors to understand work done to reduce the risks to children from sexual exploitation and going missing is structured and delivered
 - the most recent performance management and quality assurance information used to monitor and develop practice in these areas of work.

⁴¹ For example, common assessment framework (CAF).

- 2.03 A report on those children known to the local authority who are currently being privately fostered. This report should include, for each child:
 - child unique ID and the date of birth
 - date private fostering arrangement commenced
- 2.04 The number of children who are electively home educated
- 2.05 A report on children, for whom the local authority is responsible, who are of school age and who are not in receipt of full-time school education at the time of inspection. This report should include for each child:
 - child unique ID or UPN and the date of birth
 - type of educational provision that they are receiving, including home tuition
 - number of hours provision per week (in particular, whether they are receiving more or less than 25 hours per week)
 - type of exclusion (if the child has been excluded)
 - date when alternative provision commenced.

Children in care and care leavers

- 3.01 The strategic plan for children in care, the corporate parenting strategy/plan and the last three sets of minutes from the meetings of the corporate parenting board
- 3.02 The latest sufficiency strategy and any associated action or commissioning plans
- 3.03 The arrangements for permanence planning and any associated strategy, action plan and management information used to monitor performance
- 3.04 The most recent adoption and fostering panel reports to the local authority
- 3.05 The local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) strategy, any associated action plan and recent, relevant management information, including length of waiting time, average length of help offered and any outcome information routinely collected
- 3.06 The management report of the independent reviewing officer service
- 3.07 The annual report of the headteacher of the virtual school
- 3.08 The data the virtual school head and the local authority use to monitor the attainment, progress, attendance, exclusion, employment and training of children in care and care leavers
- 3.09 Evidence of an appropriate focus on maintaining and improving the health of children looked after, including data on health (physical, psychological and emotional) assessments and dental checks

- 3.10 The number of young people currently placed under secure accommodation welfare orders (section 25 of the Children Act 1989)
- 3.11 Any care leavers strategy, associated action plan and relevant recent management information used to monitor and develop practice (to include 'in-touch' figures and information about the completion of Pathway plans).
- 3.12 Information the local authority uses to track and manage cases in the public law outline (PLO).

Annex B. Request for further information

If inspectors request additional information during the inspection, they will use this template to record the request and the local authority's response.

Inspector that requested the information	What did the inspector request?	Why did the inspector request the information?	The date that the information is required	The local authority's response

Annex C: inspecting local authorities that are part of a regional adoption agency

267. A regional adoption agency (RAA) in itself is not a separate legal entity. Ofsted does not have powers to inspect the effectiveness of the RAA as a single entity. We inspect through the local authority lens: evaluating how the RAA is delivering the local authority's statutory responsibilities (except where a group of local authorities has set up a separate trading company or the host local authority is a Trust – see the frequently asked questions later in this annex).

On inspection

268. The ILACS framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance outlines how we evaluate the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster and adoptive carers (paragraphs 84 to 88) and the approach inspectors follow when inspecting local authorities who may be part of an RAA (paragraphs 89 to 91).

269. Where groups of local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies work together in an RAA to improve their adoption services, each local authority is still responsible for demonstrating how the arrangements comply with their statutory responsibilities and meet the needs of local children. We have the right to access records relevant to the performance of a local authority, wherever they may be held. HMI will arrange this access with the local authority.

270. Where a local authority is part of an RAA, inspectors will still look at the planning, decision making and matching for the children in that local authority. Each local authority is required to have an agency decision maker (ADM). In some local authorities, the ADM is supported by the RAA at different stages in the case management process. We would want to be assured of the effectiveness of the ADM role. We have the right to access records relevant to the performance of a local authority, wherever they may be held. This is an HMI task.

271. We will seek assurance that there is a sufficient and suitable pool of adopters for the local authority's children. We will evaluate this through, for example, checking whether children are waiting to be placed and how quickly they are placed. We will also want to understand how the local authority ensures that there are sufficient suitable adopters available and what action it has taken where this is not the case. This is an HMI task.

272. If any of the local authority's children are placed for adoption, inspectors will look at the quality and impact of the recruitment and assessment of those specific carers in up to four cases. A social care regulatory inspector will do this based on cases identified by the lead inspector. If they identify issues, the HMI will discuss with the local authority the steps it takes to assess the quality of adopters.

- 273. It remains the local authority's responsibility to demonstrate how the individual needs of children are met when the plan is adoption, even though this may be delivered through an RAA.
- 274. Inspectors will only visit the premises of the RAA if that is the only way to access the records they need to see as part of the inspection of the local authority. Many RAAs are co-located with local authorities.
- 275. We are not inspecting the effectiveness of the RAA, but we do take into account the interface between the individual local authority and the RAA. We focus on how the local authority discharges its functions through the RAA and whether the RAA meets the local authority's needs. We always look at this through the lens of the local authority. Our judgement on the progress and experiences of children in care and care leavers takes into account a whole range of information, including the range of options the local authority uses to secure permanence for these children; the experience of adoption is one aspect of permanence that we consider.
- 276. If the RAA arrangements hinder children achieving permanence and/or other issues emerge, inspectors will follow this as a line of enquiry and seek assurances from the local authority about the steps they are taking.
- 277. If the local authority being inspected is the host local authority for the RAA, we only focus on the children of that local authority and equally on the availability and suitability of adopters for their children.
- 278. The director of children's services should notify the management team at the RAA that an inspection has started.

Evaluating practice and writing the report

- 279. If a local authority is involved in an RAA we will, factually, name the RAA. However, we only evaluate what the local authority is doing for its children and this will be the focus of our overall evaluation and final report. We will only comment on the RAAs performance for the local authority when this represents a strength or area for improvement in meeting local need.
- 280. We do not share any findings with the RAA directly. Our inspection relationship is with the local authority.
- 281. The report should not make or imply any broader evaluation of the performance of the RAA. We are not judging the performance of the RAA. The ILACS is an inspection of the local authority and how they are discharging their duties to children. We have no powers to inspect the collective effectiveness of an RAA. Also, the use of any judgement language is likely to be misleading as the impact of the RAA may differ across the region.

Summary

- We want to determine whether children in need of adoption are well served. At each inspection, we are only interested in the children that the local authority is responsible for.
- Whatever the local arrangements, we will ask whether there is a sufficient and appropriate supply of adopters for the local authority's children.
- If there are failings for children, we will ask what the local authority has done to challenge or remedy this.
- We will report factually the name of the RAA. While we will report on any strengths or weaknesses for children in the local authority, we will not imply or make any judgement on the RAA.
- The evaluation of the quality of children's experiences, local authority oversight and leadership are HMI tasks. Where there is an RAA, the social care regulatory inspectors will only look at the adoptive carer cases as identified by the lead inspector.

Frequently asked questions

Should the RAA register with Ofsted?

The majority of RAAs will be a number of local authority services working together under a host local authority arrangement to deliver services. The RAA will therefore not need to register. However, there are some RAAs that are formed of other types of bodies (such as local authority trading companies or not for profit entities) or are hosted by Trusts. These types of RAAs will be required to register as VAAs and/or independent fostering agencies (IFAs).⁴² If you are in any doubt about the legitimacy of the arrangements then seek legal advice.

Some RAAs are comprised of a group of local authorities operating as a trading company. Are these RAAs required to register with Ofsted?

Yes. As a trading company, the RAA is a separate legal entity from the local authority and is required to register as a VAA and/or IFA (as appropriate).

Under which framework do we inspect those local authority children's services that are also a Trust, registered as a VAA/IFA and are part of a RAA?

We inspect VAAs and IFAs under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) and local authority children services under ILACS. Where the local authority adoption provision is delivered through a Trust and registered as VAA and IFA both

⁴² In some cases DfE are looking to exempt IFA registration where foster to adopt arrangements are linked to RAAs. The changes in regulation, if progressed and approved, will not come into effect until autumn 2018

frameworks will apply. The timing of inspections in these circumstances will be determined by the Ofsted regional office.

Q: Can the local authority children's services delegate the role of the responsible officer to the RAA?

For local authority hosted RAAs, each local authority must appoint one of its officers as the responsible officer of the adoption service.⁴³ The officer can sit in the RAA if that is what the local authority and the RAA agree, but the person must be one of that local authority's officers and not an officer from another local authority.

In those RAAs that have chosen to set up as a local authority trading company model, they must register as a VAA (see question above). For that reason, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 apply to the VAA.⁴⁴ The local authority would still need a responsible officer for adoption services.

Q: Should local authorities who are participating in RAA arrangements continue to notify Ofsted of the named officer responsible for each local authority children adoption service?

Yes. Individual local authorities should use form SC3 on our website to notify us of a change of officer for the adoption service.⁴⁵ The regulations continue to require all notifications of a change to the named local authority officer responsible for the adoption service to be sent to us by the individual local authority. This includes all participating local authorities in regional adoption arrangements.

Q: Where can I find more information on the government's plans for adoption?

In 2016, the DfE published *Adoption: A Vision for Change*, which sets out how the government plans to address challenges in the adoption system over the next four years www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-a-vision-for-change

⁴³ (as per regulation 5) www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/370/contents/made

⁴⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/367/contents/made

⁴⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-providers-sc3-changes-to-individuals-or-premises

Annex D. Links to legislation, regulations and statutory guidance

Acts of Parliament

Children Act 1989

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents

Adoption and Children Act 2002

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/38/contents

Children Act 2004

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents

Education and Inspections Act 2006

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/47/contents

Children and Young Persons Act 2008

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents

Equality Act 2010

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

Children and Families Act 2014

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

Care Standards Act 2000

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents

Regulations

Separate sections below cover regulations in relation to fostering and adoption

Visits to Former Children in care in Detention (England) Regulations 2010

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/2797/contents/made

Visits to Children in Long-Term Residential Care Regulations 2011

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/1010/made

The Arrangements for Placement of Children by Voluntary Organisations and Others (England) Regulations 2011

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/582/contents/made

The Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Children's Homes etc.) Regulations 2007 (as amended)

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/694/contents/made

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/959/contents/made

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (Relevant Care Functions) (England) Regulations 2014

www.legislation.gov.uk/id/uksi/2014/2407

The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 1: Court Orders

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-court-orders--2

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-care-planning-placement-and-case-review

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-transition-to-adulthood-for-care-leavers

Statutory guidance

Separate sections below cover statutory guidance in relation to fostering and adoption

Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2015)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2

Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care (2014)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care

Statutory guidance: Promoting the Health and Well-being of Children in care (2015)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2

Short Breaks: statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/short-breaks-for-disabled-children

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Local authority responsibilities towards former children in care in custody (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-former-looked-after-children-in-custody

IRO handbook: Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers (IROs) and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for children in care (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-reviewing-officers-handbook

Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services (2013)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/Directors-of-childrens-services-roles-and-responsibilities

Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for children in care (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-sufficient-accommodation-for-looked-after-children

Promoting the education of children in care: statutory guidance for local authorities (2014)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children

Junior Individual Saving Accounts for Children in care: Statutory guidance for Local Authorities (2012);

www.gov.uk/government/publications/junior-individual-saving-accounts-for-looked-after-children

Special guardianship guidance and regulations (2012)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/special-guardianship-guidance

Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/provision-of-accommodation-for-16-and-17-year-olds-who-may-be-homeless-and-or-require-accommodation

Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards

www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide

Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities, Department for Education, 2013

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education

Keeping children safe in education (2015)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2

Designated teacher for looked-after children

www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-children

Children's social care: getting the best from complaints

www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-getting-the-best-from-complaints

Placement of looked-after children in EU Member States

www.gov.uk/government/publications/placement-of-looked-after-children-in-eu-member-states

Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery (2017)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-of-unaccompanied-and-trafficked-children

Providing advocacy services for children and young people

www.gov.uk/government/publications/advocacy-services-for-children-and-young-people

Additional guidance

Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked: practice guidance (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-who-may-have-been-trafficked-practice-guidance

Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary guidance (2009)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-and-young-people-from-sexual-exploitation-supplementary-guidance

Missing Children and Adults strategy (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/missing-children-and-adults-strategy

Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners (2015)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice

What to do if you're worried a child is being abused (2015)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-to-do-if-youre-worried-a-child-is-being-abused--2

Children in care and adoption performance tables

www.gov.uk/government/collections/children-in-care-and-adoption-performance-tables

Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons
(College of Policing)

www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/

Tackling child sexual exploitation: action plan (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation-action-plan

What to do if you're worried a child is being abused: advice for practitioners (2015)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-to-do-if-you-suspect-a-child-is-being-sexually-exploited

Prospectus: delivering intensive interventions for children in care and those on the edge of care or custody and their families (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/prospectus-delivering-intensive-interventions-for-looked-after-children-and-those-on-the-edge-of-care-or-custody-and-their-families

Improving the Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils: Final Report (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-outcomes-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-pupils-final-report

A framework of outcomes for young people (2012)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people

What works re-engaging young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)? Summary of evidence from the activity agreement pilots and the entry to learning pilots (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-works-re-engaging-young-people-who-are-not-in-education-employment-or-training-neet-summary-of-evidence-from-the-activity-agreement-pilots-an

Maltreated children in the looked after system: a comparison of outcomes for those who go home and those who do not (2010)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/maltreated-children-in-the-looked-after-system-a-comparison-of-outcomes-for-those-who-go-home-and-those-who-do-not

Social mobility indicators (includes attainment gap at ages 11, 16 and 19)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-indicators/social-mobility-indicators

Care leavers in England data pack (2012)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leavers-in-england-local-authority-data-pack

Care leaver strategy (2013)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leaver-strategy

2010 to 2015 government policy: children's social workers

www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-childrens-social-workers/2010-to-2015-government-policy-childrens-social-workers

Staying put: arrangements for care leavers aged 18 and above to stay on with their former foster carers (2013)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leavers-aged-18-years-and-above

Supporting looked-after children with communication needs

www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-looked-after-children-with-communication-needs

Railway Children Reach model: a best practice model which looks at support for those who run away or are missing from home care (before, during and after the incident)

www.railwaychildren.org.uk/our-solution/where-we-work/uk/reach-model

Adoption

Local Authority Social Services Act 1970;

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1970/42/contents

Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/691/contents/made

Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/888/contents/made

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/389/contents/made

Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/2720/contents/made

Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/890/contents/made

Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption and Fostering) Regulations 2009

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2009/395/introduction/made

Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1711/made?view=plain

Adoption: National Minimum Standards (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-national-minimum-standards

Statutory guidance on adoption (2013)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-statutory-guidance-2013

Right on time: exploring delays in adoption (2012)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/exploring-delays-in-adoption-right-on-time

Regionalising adoption (2015)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-adoption-agencies-programme

Fostering

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (as amended)

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/581/contents/made

Fostering services: national minimum standards (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards

The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 4: fostering services (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-fostering-services

Assessment and approval of foster carers: amended guidance (2013)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-assessment-and-approval-of-foster-carers

Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-family-and-friends-care

Children Act 1989: private fostering

www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-private-fostering

Training, support and development standards for foster care: guidance for managers, supervising social workers (2012)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/training-support-and-development-standards-for-foster-care-evidence-workbook

The Foster Carers' Charter (2011)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/foster-carers-charter

The demographic characteristics of foster carers in the UK: motivations, barriers and messages for recruitment and retention (2012)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-demographic-characteristics-of-foster-carers-in-the-uk-motivations-barriers-and-messages-for-recruitment-and-retention

Local safeguarding arrangements

Local Safeguarding Children Boards Regulations 2006

www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/90/contents/made

Working Together: transitional guidance (Statutory guidance for Local Safeguarding Children Boards, local authorities, safeguarding partners, child death review partners, and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2

Websites

Disclosure and Barring Service

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) website

www.ceop.police.uk/

ChildLine

www.childline.org.uk/pages/home.aspx

NSPCC National Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC)

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-trafficking/

NSPCC ChildLine number (telephone: 0800 1111)

www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/the-work-we-do/childline-services/childline-services-hub_wdh90503.html

Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE)

www.paceuk.info/

Summary of framework changes

This section outlines additions to guidance or changes to the inspection methodology. This does not include corrections or changes made to improve clarity in how the framework is written.

We first published this framework in November 2017.

Changes made in September 2018

- We will no longer carry out re-inspections of inadequate local authorities using the single inspection framework. We will re-inspect using a standard inspection under this framework.
- Added a reference to our new privacy notices.
- Introduced additional moderation for focused visit letters that identify an area for priority action.
- New guidance on producing an action plan after giving an area for priority action on a focused visit.
- Clarified our arrangements for a summary report for children and young people after standard and short inspections.
- In Annex A, two items were numbered 3.04 in the list of 'Information the local authority uses to manage its services'. We corrected this, which also affects the numbering of subsequent documents in this list.

Changes made in February 2018

- Removed columns from the template in Annex B (request for further information) to simplify it.
- Added annex C, guidance for inspections where a local authority is part of a regional adoption agency.



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