Home > Local authority and children's homes in England inspections and outcomes – autumn 2019

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Official Statistics

Local authority and children's homes in England: quality and methodology report

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Contents

The Local authority and children's homes inspections and outcomes in England release also includes:

- data tables
- methodology
- pre-release access list

Introduction

This document contains quality and methodology information relevant to Ofsted's annual release of local authority (LA) and children's homes inspections and

outcomes data.

You should read it in conjunction with the background notes contained within the [statistical first release (SFR)](#), as those notes will include helpful information that is not in this report.

Methodology

The SFR contains data sourced from Ofsted's register of social care providers in England, and from inspections carried out by Ofsted. The release includes data about LA and children's homes inspections and outcomes.

The inspections and outcomes data relates to inspections of:

- children's homes
- LA services for children who need help and protection, children in care and care leavers

The inspections of LA children's services are carried out under the inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. You can find more information about inspection frameworks in Annex 1 of this document.

Periods covered by the release

In terms of the periods covered by the release, inspections and outcomes data for children's homes can either be viewed:

- for a 5-month period from 1 April 2019 to 31 August 2019, covering provisional data,
- as the latest inspection for each home as at 31 August 2019, covering final data

For LA inspections, the data in this release can also be viewed either:

- for a 5-month period from 1 April 2019 to 31 August 2019, covering provisional data
- as the latest inspection for each LA as at 31 August 2019, covering final data

This release previously covered the 6-month period 1 April to 30 September. It also showed the latest inspection outcomes for children's homes and LAs as at 30 September.

More information

In March 2019 Ofsted ran a [consultation](#) to seek views on our proposals for revisions to the frequency and content of social care inspection official statistics and management information. Based on the responses, we decided to make all the changes as proposed in the consultation. As a result, from autumn 2019, this release covers a 5-month period, from 1 April to 31 August, and is published in November to align it with the period for other remits (types of provider we inspect) and with the period covered by our Annual Report.

This statistical release is supplemental to the full release, which includes data on inspections and providers and places for all social care provisions that Ofsted regulates and/or inspects. The full release is published annually, in June to July, covering data up to 31 March, with this supplemental release, published in November, covering data up to 31 August. The supplemental release only includes data relating to inspections of children's homes and LA children's services.

This publication contains some provisional data. This is because there may have been additional inspections carried out during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 August 2019 that had not yet been published at the time of the data being extracted for the release. Any revisions to these 5 months of data for children's homes will be included in the June to July 2020 statistical release.

This 5-monthly release includes some data that was not included in the July 2019 release because there were some inspections carried out between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 that had not yet had their reports published when the data was extracted for the July 2019 release.

We publish a number of [official statistics](#) covering children's social care, including fostering, adoption and children in care placements.

We welcome feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the Social Care Data and Analysis Team on: socialcaredata@ofsted.gov.uk.

Relevance

Ofsted regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted official statistics are released to promote reform and improvement across government through increasing transparency and citizen participation.

Ofsted regulates and inspects registered social care provisions under the [Care Standards Act 2000](#). Ofsted inspects LA children's services, under section 136 (2) of the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#). You can find more [contextual information about social care in England, and Ofsted's inspection activity](#) in the SFR and our Annual Report.

For more information on how Ofsted regulates and/or inspects, see:

- [children's social care providers](#)
- [LA children's services](#)

> The social care common inspection framework came into use from April 2017. You can read details of the changes from the previous framework in the [consultation document](#).

How the data is used

Social care inspections and outcomes are important information for policy development, as well as for planning and providing public services, for example by informing about the quality of social care provisions nationally and by area. There is a demand for inspections and outcomes information, for example to help Ofsted meet its obligations under inspection legislation and to influence policy.

The data contributes to meetings with organisations such as the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), informing policy discussions and decisions.

You can find inspection reports on the [Ofsted reports website](#) and on our main website, [statistics about the outcomes of inspections](#).

Ofsted also uses the data to enhance insight into this sector, including contributing to the reviews of inspection frameworks, evidence and reports.

The data is published annually as official statistics, with a supplementary publication covering a 5-month period, which is the publication to which this report relates. The aggregation of data for official statistics allows us to communicate to users the key data and messages about children's homes, for example, at different geographical levels. The official statistics draw out the key messages and communicate these in an understandable way, appropriate for a wide range of different users. Users are able to interpret and manipulate the data published for their own purposes, as the release includes underlying data.

The data may, therefore, be used by stakeholder groups, academics and other interested parties across the sector. LAs may also use the data themselves, for local and regional use, to inform on areas of practice and to improve processes and standards.

Some of the data about children's homes in England is unique to Ofsted and alternative sources are not available. For instance, data about inspections and outcomes is only collected by Ofsted. This data is widely viewed as a valuable

source of information about services available in England, and for providing an in-depth overall picture of the quality of children's homes provision in England.

Meeting user needs

In early 2019, Ofsted's Social Care Data and Analysis Team reviewed the production of children's social care statistical releases and ran a [consultation](#) to seek users' views on our proposals for revisions to the frequency and content of social care inspection official statistics and management information.

Two of the 3 proposals related to this release:

- changing the period covered by the local authority and children's homes official statistics from 6 months to 5 months
- removing the interactive tables from the underlying data

Based on the responses, we decided to make all the changes as proposed in the consultation.

User feedback

Ofsted's Social Care Data and Analysis Team is represented at regional meetings of performance leads from LAs. These regional meetings are organised by the ADCS. We have presented relevant information and publications to all of the existing regional groups, and sought feedback about whether our publications meet user needs.

Ofsted's participation in these groups helps inform about user views on our social care official statistics, and suggested improvements are taken on board. For instance, in addition to the consultation response regarding production of annual data, feedback from providers and stakeholders indicated that a full set of inspections and outcomes as at 31 March would be preferred and more comprehensive. Therefore, in addition to the annual statistics, the release was amended for the 2015 data to include an option to view the latest inspection judgement as at the 31 March. This includes all active providers, not just those inspected during the year.

Children's homes and LA outputs are also shared with users in other organisations, such as the DfE, LAs, and representatives from the private and voluntary sectors at Ofsted-led stakeholder meetings. These organisations use the data for a range of purposes including informing their own social care outputs (DfE) and benchmarking performance (LAs).

The contact details for the Social Care Data and Analysis team are included in the releases and users are encouraged to feedback about any unmet needs or

improvements that can be made.

The previous user engagement that shaped this release included:

- a consultation, in 2014, on the proposed arrangements for the frequency and content of social care inspection official statistics. See the consultation report
- an Ofsted-wide user consultation survey in January 2012 on all Ofsted official statistics releases. See the archived report from this consultation

There is more information available about Ofsted's engagement policy and confidentiality and access policy, as well as our statement of administrative sources. Ofsted also operates under more detailed internal engagement guidance.

Coherence and comparability

Comparisons of inspections and outcomes across different inspection frameworks are not always possible due to the changes to the evaluation criteria and scope of inspection. You can find more information about inspection frameworks in Annex 1 of this quality report. The release itself makes a clear distinction for framework changes, such that it is clear to users where inspections are not directly comparable.

Comparisons of inspections and outcomes across different timescales within a particular inspection cycle are not always possible due to the way providers are risk assessed and selected for inspection. Ofsted takes a proportionate approach to inspection. Some providers are selected for inspection because they are approaching the deadline for re-inspection and others as a result of their previous inspection outcomes. Where this occurs, however, information is given in the release. The revision of the release to present annual, rather than quarterly, statistics allows users to more easily compare inspections and outcomes across timescales for some provider types, such as children's homes which are all inspected annually.

Within the main findings, where statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have improved or declined, this analysis is based on comparable inspections only and uses the most recent relevant inspection outcome.

Inspections of social care provision in other countries in the UK are carried out by:

- the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)
- the Care Inspectorate in Scotland
- the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority in Northern Ireland

Ofsted is the only inspectorate in the UK that publishes detailed statistics about the quality of social care providers that it regulates and inspects, and so comparison with others is not possible. Comparable data for other countries,

including via the Eurostat database, is not available.

Data is considered both in period, 1 April to 31 August, and as at a fixed date, 31 August. Again, comparisons are made between years where appropriate. Data is also considered and compared between provider types, regions, sectors – private, local authority, voluntary – and, where appropriate, LAs.

Accuracy and reliability

The data used for this SFR is data that belongs to Ofsted, as administrative data extracted directly from our internal database system, Cygnum.

The data is subject to a rigorous quality assurance (QA) process by Ofsted, both as part of our internal processes for ensuring data quality in the regulatory records system, and as part of the production of this SFR.

The inspections and outcomes data within the release does not use any imputation or other statistical techniques and data is not used to make any estimates about the population or other geographical areas. As the data is solely reporting on events that have occurred, the risk of bias or error is reduced.

We are able to extract all data to ensure that any data entered incorrectly at the operational stage is accounted for, and duplicates or incorrect records removed from the data set. This limits the risk of error in the data. Furthermore, data about inspection judgements is made available to the public. All providers are sent copies of their inspection report for a factual accuracy check prior to publication. Inspection judgements held in the data systems will, therefore, always be verified by inspectors, and providers are also given the opportunity during the QA phase of the report to check and comment on the inspection judgements. Individual inspection reports are published and this offers a high level of transparency and assurance. If errors were being brought in at the operational level, there is a clear right of reply for stakeholders. Checks of the statistical data against both the system data source and published inspection reports provide an additional level of assurance.

An example of the system-wide data checks is the rigorous checking of one particular area of data, which has turned inaccurate and partially completed data into complete and very valuable data. Several years ago, sector data was input at source, at best haphazardly and often wrong. Ofsted statisticians have transformed that into accurate data, by working with the administrative teams on the definition of the various sectors and also on the guidelines for completing the data filed in our database. The Social Care Data and Analysis team also carried out a national data cleanse of this data, which involved contacting every provider and getting them to confirm the sector they were part of. The data now enables Ofsted to report on the sectors both internally and to wider users. This is important because there is a growing public interest in sector data and how the ownership pattern of social care providers may or may not be changing over time, and also

the level of service provided by the differing sectors.

The dataset is securely stored in Excel format accessible only to Ofsted colleagues working on the release. Some initial aggregation of data is done using an SQL database, but analysis is done entirely in Excel.

More than 1 analyst is involved in the production and analysis of the data and QA is always carried out by a different team member to the person who produced the work. QA checks are carried out on the SQL code used to export data, all processing and calculations, the release template, the combined dataset, the analysis and the main findings, along with any supplementary statistics that are published. All outputs are reviewed and subject to a sign off process to ensure suitability for publication.

Strengths of the data

The data belongs to Ofsted: this allows for certainty around the QA carried out on all data.

Robust QA of the data by Ofsted: We carry out detailed QA of all tables, underlying data and reports created from this data.

Comprehensive snapshot of the children's homes sector: due to the known quality of the data, it provides a comprehensive picture of children's homes in England over the last 3 years.

All required data present: due to the data being internal, there is almost no missing data.

No risk of bias: as discussed above, this SFR reports on events that have happened, and so there is no risk of bias.

Limitations of the data

Limited comparable data: much of the data held is only held by Ofsted, and therefore cannot be verified against other sources.

Incorrect reporting by providers: in a small number of cases, data supplied by providers does not appear to be accurate. For example, it may contain an incorrect postcode. This has minimal impact on this particular SFR, however, and is usually identified during QA.

Errors or corrections in recording: although these are again minimal, there are occasions when data is recorded incorrectly, or needs to be amended. For example, a setting may be recorded as being private instead of

voluntary provision, which can impact on comparability between years. These are usually identified during the QA stage and accounted for.

Timeliness and punctuality

Statistics are produced and published on an annual basis. An additional release covering 5 months is published, which relates only to inspections and outcomes for children's homes and Las. Supplementary data, including management information, is also published to improve accessibility to and usefulness of data, where appropriate.

Data is published on the date pre-announced in the [publication schedule](#). Information on any delay in publication can also be found on the publication schedule. Reasons why a delay may occur include, for example, when more time is necessary to properly QA the data to ensure robustness. Publications are announced on Ofsted's Twitter account and other social media channels on the day of release.

The average timescale for production of the local authority and children's homes inspections and outcomes release is approximately 8 weeks. This time includes obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and publishing the information on the Ofsted website.

Pre-release is given in accordance with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (2008), as detailed in [Ofsted's pre-release policy](#).

Accessibility and clarity

Ofsted releases are published in an accessible format on GOV.UK. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data.

[Data covering children's social care](#) is held on a collections page on GOV.UK.

The primary function of the data is to meet Ofsted's data requirements for inspections. However, the data is shared for public use with the intention of informing the public about children's social care in England and for re-use by analysts and researchers, as may be required.

Performance, cost and respondent

burden

As data is administrative, there is no associated cost or respondent burden.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

Where Ofsted holds sensitive or personal data, the disclosure control processes we have in place ensure that this data is not published. All data releases follow [Ofsted's confidentiality and revisions policies](). All staff using sensitive data have been trained in confidentially and disclosure awareness.

Some data fields are redacted from the underlying data for data protection purposes. Data affected by redactions includes fields related to provider names and addresses. All inspection judgements are provided in full without redaction. All inspection data presented in statistical tables is actual figures; the data is not subject to rounding or suppression.

Methodology

Data processing involves aggregating numbers of inspections, listed by inspection type, provision type, region and inspection outcome. This processing is done using SQL and is reviewed and revised regularly.

Inspection data is summarised in 2 formats: inspections carried out in a defined period, and latest inspection as at a particular point in time. Both types of inspection data only include inspections that had their reports published at the time of producing the SFR.

The defined period of inspection data is dependent on the type of provision:

- data about inspections of LA children's services includes inspections that were carried out under the current framework, and therefore do not reflect an annual period; the period covered is detailed in the release
- data about inspections of all children's homes includes inspections that were carried out during the period of 5 months from 1 April to 31 August

The latest inspection data covers all children's homes, irrespective of when the inspections were carried out. Only 1 inspection per provider is counted. The data reflects the latest inspection for each provider, that is, the most recent published event at the time of producing the data. This means that the data will include some inspections that have been carried out under previous inspection frameworks. Further explanatory notes are given in the release.

No data has been removed prior to analysis.

Definitions are provided in the SFR. The glossary includes a list of the provision types and describes what each provision type offers.

Relevant inspection frameworks, for social care providers in England

Children's homes:
[Ofsted inspections of childrens homes](#).

This link now refers to the social care common inspection framework, in use from April 2017.

LA children's services:
[Inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS)](#).

This link now refers to the inspections of local authority children's services framework, in use from January 2018.

Instructions for printing and saving

Instructions may vary depending on which browser you use, such as Internet Explorer or Google Chrome, and the type of device you use, such as an iPhone or laptop.

You will find your print and save options in your browser's menu. You may also have other options available on your device. The instructions for mobile and tablet devices will be specific to their make and model.

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