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Guidance

Inspecting local authority children's services

Updated 17 August 2020

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Introduction

This document sets out the framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS). We first published this framework in November 2017. We published this updated version in August 2020. There is a summary of the changes available.

This framework and guidance are to help inspectors 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.

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

We also evaluate:

- the effectiveness of leaders and managers
- the impact they have on the lives of children and young people
- the quality of professional practice

In law, the term 'children in care' refers to those who are subject to a care order. However, in this framework and the associated inspection reports we have chosen to use 'children in care' to refer to all looked after children and young people because it is what this group have told us they prefer.

This framework and guidance are to help inspectors 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

Ofsted's corporate strategy outlines how we will carry out 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 are 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

Our approach to ILACS is further underpinned by 3 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

Whole-system approach

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

The ILACS 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 4-point scale
- joint targeted area inspections (JTAI)

We have described each part of this system in more detail later in the framework.

Applying a proportionate and risk-based approach to inspection

There is no fixed cycle or end date for the ILACS programme. We use the intelligence and information we have to inform decisions about how best to inspect each local authority.

There will be times when concerns arise about a local authority. The regional director will decide whether to carry out an inspection (standard or short inspection), at which we make a graded judgement, or whether a focused visit would be more appropriate.

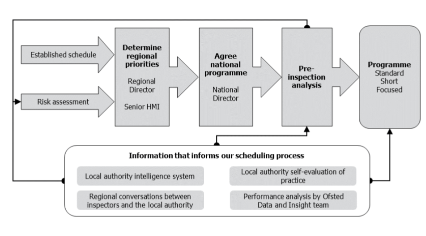
In most cases, if the next standard or short inspection is not due, we will carry out a focused visit. This gives the local authority and us the opportunity to identify what is going well and what needs to improve before the next judgement inspection.

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.

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.

Within the ILACS system, deciding which type of inspection to deploy in which local authority is a complex and dynamic process. Figure 1 sets out this process.

Figure 1. Steps for agreeing the ILACS inspection programme

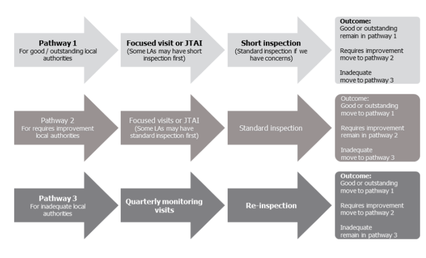


Proportionate timing of inspection

We will inspect local authorities based on the intelligence we have about them and their most recent inspection judgement. Standard and short inspections will usually happen once every 3 years, plus or minus 6 months.

Figure 2 summarises the different inspection pathways we use depending on the most recent inspection judgement.

Figure 2. The proportionate inspection pathways for ILACS



Inspections will not usually begin over the Christmas and New Year period.

The only activities that might take place in August are planned monitoring visits and focused visits by agreement, or if concerns arise.

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

The local authority may request a deferral of an inspection or visit. We will decide whether a deferral should be granted in accordance with our policy.

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

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 3 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 2.

In between inspections, the local authority will usually receive 1 focused visit or a JTAI.

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

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 3 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 1.

In between inspections, the local authority will receive up to 2 focused visits. A focused visit may be replaced by a JTAI.

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

Local authorities judged inadequate at their most recent inspection will receive monitoring visits followed by a re-inspection. We will usually carry out between 4 and 6 monitoring visits before the re-inspection. We will re-inspect an inadequate local authority using a standard inspection.

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 3.

The table below summarises the range of events that will exist under the ILACS system by the Ofsted inspection grade.

Most recent inspection judgement	ILACS events
Good or outstanding local authority	Short inspection (once in a 3-year period) Usually 1 focused visit in between inspections Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit) Shared self-evaluation Annual engagement meeting
Requires improvement to be good local authority	Standard inspection (once in a 3-year period) Up to 2 focused visits in between inspections Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit) Shared self-evaluation Annual engagement meeting
Inadequate local authority	Monitoring visits Standard inspection (after we have completed monitoring visits) Shared self-evaluation Annual engagement meeting

ILACS and other joint inspections

We will continue to carry out both JTAIs and area SEND inspections. We will continue to coordinate the scheduling of inspections of ILACS and the area 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 area SEND inspection.

The 4 inspectorates (Ofsted, Care Quality Commission (CQC), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP)) 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

Local authority self-evaluation of social work practice

Each year, we will ask local authorities to share a self-evaluation of social work practice with us and to meet with our regional representatives to discuss it. This part of the framework is voluntary but it 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).

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.

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.

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.

The self-evaluation should draw on existing documentation and activity. It should reflect the local authority's business as usual in order to avoid additional burden. We do not expect local authorities to carry out additional work to inform the self-evaluation.

Inspectors look at a local authority's most recent self-evaluation when preparing for the next inspection or focused visit.

The self-evaluation should answer 3 questions:

1. What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
2. How do you know it?
3. What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

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.

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.

There is no prescribed format or content for the self-evaluation. Local authorities should apply the following principles. The self-evaluation:

- should answer the 3 questions outlined above
- 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

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

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

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.

The meeting should be carried out in a spirit of positive transparency and benefit everyone involved.

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.

The meeting should cover:

- the content of the self-evaluation – what 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

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 its self-evaluation so that the information is up to date.

The timing of the annual engagement meeting should take into account planned peer review arrangements and activity relating to a regional improvement alliance.

A regional representative from Ofsted will chair the meeting. The meeting may focus on other local authority duties, for example in relation to school inspection, but it should include the appropriate personnel and allow sufficient time for children's social care issues to be explored.

The DCS and our regional director and/or social care Senior Her Majesty's Inspector (SHMI) or Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) will attend. 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'. 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 for being there.

The regional SHMI and the DCS will agree the agenda in advance of the meeting.

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

Scope

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

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 1 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 intervention (these children may be known by any person with a duty under the Children Act 2004; the Childcare Act 2006; section 175 or any regulations made under 157 of the Education Act 2002; the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, a member of the local safeguarding partnership; or a person associated with a commissioned service, including local voluntary services)
- 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 (including children subject to private fostering arrangements) 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
- 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 orders (including children and young people who are detained, unaccompanied child migrants or asylum seekers)
- aged 16 or 17 who are preparing to leave care and meet the definition of 'eligible'; those aged 16 or 17 who have left care and are 'relevant'; young people aged 18 and above and are 'former relevant'; and young people aged 18 to 25 who qualify as 'former relevant children pursuing further education or training', including children in houses of multiple occupation
- 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

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 inspections

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 ILACS functions as listed in section 135 of the EIA.

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
- when 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

On a standard inspection, inspectors will gather evidence across the ILACS scope.

We will give 5 working days' notice of the inspection. The inspection team for a standard inspection will usually be 4 social care inspectors. In addition, a social care regulatory inspector will be on site for up to 2 days and an education inspector will be on site for 1 day.

Inspection teams may include an additional inspector who will be shadowing the work of their colleagues. Any activity they carry out will be for their training and development or to evaluate the inspection framework and methodology. They will not carry out any inspection work independently or gather evidence that will inform the inspection judgements.

Week 1: notice period – off site

Usual day of the week	Activities
Monday	Lead inspector phone call to DCS to announce the inspection Afternoon 'set-up' discussion between lead inspector and DCS (by telephone or in person)
Tuesday	Local authority shares child-level data and information about audits
Wednesday	Local authority shares performance and management information
Thursday and Friday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence Telephone conference team meeting (including an Ofsted analytical officer)

Week 2: on site

Usual day of the week	Activities
Monday	Lead inspector on site in the afternoon to meet DCS and set up the inspection Full team on site pm
Tuesday to Thursday	Full team on site gathering evidence
Friday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence

Week 3: on site

Usual day of the week	Activities

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

Short inspection arrangements

On a short inspection, inspectors will gather evidence across the ILACS scope. We will give 5 working days' notice of the inspection. The inspection team for a short inspection will usually be 4 social care inspectors, but for some smaller local authorities, we may send fewer inspectors. In addition, a social care regulatory inspector will be on site for up to 2 days and a schools inspector will be on site for 1 day.

Inspection teams may include an additional inspector who will be shadowing the work of their colleagues. Any activity they carry out will be for their training and development or to evaluate the inspection framework and methodology. They will not carry out any inspection work independently or gather evidence that will inform the inspection judgements.

Week 1: notice period – off site

Usual day of the week	Activities
Monday	Lead inspector phone call to DCS to announce the inspection Afternoon 'set-up' discussion between lead inspector and DCS (by telephone or in person)
Tuesday	Local authority shares child-level data and information about audits
Wednesday	Local authority shares performance and management information
Thursday and Friday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence Telephone conference team meeting (including an Ofsted analytical officer)

Week 2: on site

Usual day of the week	Activities
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 off site by early afternoon

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 2-week inspection delivered in 1 week. Inspectors preparing for a short inspection will start with a mindset 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

In a short inspection, inspectors will seek to answer 3 questions:

1. Has the quality and impact of practice been maintained?
2. Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have improved?
3. Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have deteriorated?

This approach enables the lead inspector to prioritise gathering primary evidence 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.

Evaluating individual children's records that have already been audited by the local authority is another effective way to answer the 3 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 on short and standard inspections

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

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 several criteria that describe the features of a good service or good experiences and progress for children. Inspectors do not have to gather evidence against each individual criterion. The evaluation criteria help the inspection team make the correct judgement on the 4-point grading scheme.

The order of evidence-gathering in standard and short inspections

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.

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 (for example, to pick up security passes or gain access to IT systems)

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.

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

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
- 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

The PIA will include the regional SHMI's analysis of the most recent self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting with the local authority.

Annex A lists the information that we request from the local authority at the start of the inspection.

The lead inspector will have time allocated, before fieldwork begins, to review the PIA, 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
- decide 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

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.

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.

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.

Inspectors must review the information in Annex A 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 1 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

The lead inspector will ensure that the local authority (usually the DCS) is notified by telephone of the inspection by 9.30am 5 working days before the fieldwork starts. If notification is due on a bank holiday, we will move it to the previous working day.

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.

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 the information set out in Annex A. Annex A lists information we think the local authority will already maintain to inform its oversight and management of its service. On this basis, we do not consider that the information we request is unreasonable. The lead inspector will offer the DCS an opportunity for a conversation later the same day to give the DCS time to bring together the relevant staff. This conversation will usually be by phone, but the lead inspector may meet with the DCS in person if it is practical to do so.

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.

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 prepare for the on-site activity. They will:

- 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 will 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. When opportunities arise during the fieldwork to speak with or observe contact 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 SHMI 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

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.

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

The lead inspector and 3 inspectors will arrive on site on Monday afternoon. All inspectors will show their inspector identity badges. They do not need to carry copies of their Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

When the lead inspector arrives on site, 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.

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
- inspectors have time to reflect on, record and analyse evidence, individually and as a team

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.

On-site inspection activity will not normally continue after 6pm on any fieldwork day.

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

During a standard or short inspection, the social care regulatory inspector will be on site for up to 2 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.

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 4 foster carer households (including a recent carer assessment)
- up to 4 adopter households (including a recent carer assessment)

The lead inspector will ask the local authority to provide lists of foster carers and adopters at the start of the inspection (see Annex A). They will use these lists to select the households mentioned above and ask the local authority to share their most recent assessments of these foster carers and adopters.

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

Conversations with carers and staff will usually be by telephone. The lead inspector will ask the local authority to help arrange these calls.

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.

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.

If a local authority manages its own recruitment, assessment, training and support for adopters, inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of these arrangements. If 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.

To understand how the local authority works with the RAA 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. See 'guidance for inspecting local authorities that are part of a regional adoption agency' for more information.

Evaluating the educational progress of children in care and care leavers

Each standard and short inspection will include a schools HMI. The schools HMI will be allocated 2 days – the first Monday and Tuesday of fieldwork.

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 headteacher for a conversation by phone.

On the Tuesday, they will be on site and will interview the virtual school headteacher 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.

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

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

Inspectors will make their graded judgements on a 4-point scale:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement to be good
- inadequate

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 describe as 'best fit'.

The overall effectiveness judgement is derived from findings in each of the 3 other judgement areas. Inspectors will use both evidence and their professional judgement to award the overall effectiveness grade.

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.

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.

If, at the end of fieldwork, the local authority's children's services are judged inadequate, inspectors will follow the section in this guidance on monitoring inadequate local authorities.

Focused visits

Focused visits evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children. HMI carry out these visits under section 136(2) of the EIA. HMCI has the power to carry out ILACS functions as listed in section 135 of the EIA.

Focused visit arrangements

Focused visits will happen between standard and short inspections. We will usually give 5 working days' notice of the visit. Usually, 2 inspectors will be on site for 2 days contained within 1 week. Focused visits will include some or all of the same inspection activity as a standard or short inspection.

Week 1: notice period – off site

Usual day of the week	Activities
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 shares child-level data, information about audits and performance and management information
Thursday and Friday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence Telephone conference team meeting

Week 2: on site

Usual day of the week	Activities
Monday	Off-site evaluation of evidence
Tuesday	Full team on site gathering evidence
Wednesday	Full team on site gathering evidence and providing feedback

Some focused visits may take place on Wednesday and Thursday. All other milestones will be adjusted by 1 day to reflect this.

Focused visit topics

A focused visit will look at 1 or more aspects of the service, themes or cohorts of children. Inspections will use evaluation criteria from this framework or from our JTAIs.

We will make the final decision about the focused visit topic to be covered. The decision will be based on 1 or more of the following:

- if a specific area of service has been identified in a local authority as an example of good or outstanding practice
- if a specific area of service has been identified as one that needs to improve or an area where themes, trends and issues are identified
- if an agreement between us and the local authority has been made that a specific focus will support that local authority's improvement journey
- if we decide to carry out a short programme in a particular area of service, which will then lead to a thematic overview

Each focused visit will cover part of the scope of standard and short inspections.

The scope for individual focused visits can be narrowed within each topic. Leadership is a feature of all focused visits, principally through the lens of the impact of leaders on practice with children and families.

A list of topics and what they may include is set out below.

Topic: the front door

The front door is the service that receives contacts and referrals (single- or multi-agency), where decisions are made about:

- child protection enquiries – such as strategy discussions or section 47 enquiries
- emergency action – liaison with police to use powers of protection or applications for an emergency protection order
- child in need assessments
- decisions to accommodate
- step-up from and step-down to early help
- no further action/signposting

Topic: children in need or subject to a protection plan

This may cover:

- thresholds
- step-up/step-down between children in need and child protection
- children on the edge of care
- children subject to a 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 children from extra-familial risk

This may cover:

- 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

This may cover:

- quality of matching, placement and decision-making for children in care
- the experiences and progress of disabled children in care
- the experiences and progress of children living in unregulated and/or unregistered provision

Planning and achieving permanence

This may cover:

- return to birth family
- connected (family and friends) care
- adoption
- long-term foster or residential care
- special guardianship

Care leavers

This may cover:

- care leavers aged 16 and 17
- care leavers aged 18 to 25
- quality and suitability of accommodation
- employment, education and training
- transition to adulthood
- staying close and in touch

Findings at focused visits

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

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.

Inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will identify expectations for improvement and ask you to do something about it.

Inspectors will also:

- ensure that we are meeting our duty to inform the relevant authority of any serious concerns we have about a service.

Inspectors will provide details for accessing a secure online site that the local authority can use to share information.

Before a monitoring visit

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 children they think we should view the most frequently.

The inspection team uses the local authority's audit tool. Usually, the inspector will ask the local authority to fill in the audit tool. The local authority should share the completed audit tool with the inspection team at least 2 working days before the visit.

We will discuss the content of the audit tool with the local authority during our pre-visit discussion.

Inspectors will provide details for accessing a secure online site that the local authority can use to share information.

On-site activity in monitoring visits

Ofsted inspectors and CQC inspectors will be in headquarters the on-site activity. On-site activity will usually consist of evaluating the local authority's self-assessment, meeting with senior managers and staff, and visiting a sample of children's services. The local authority will be asked to make children available for inspection.

To triangulate their findings, inspectors will look at a sample of other cases. The sampling activity will be informed by what they have learned from the audit and evaluating. Inspectors will usually only sample cases from the previous 3 months.

If the inspector identifies a concern, they will discuss it with the local authority and agree how to a child or children, they must bring it to the DCS's attention.

Inspectors will consider the local authority's response to the concern and discuss monitoring visit. Inspectors must record the case numbers of tracked and sampled cases and share this information with the local authority.

At the end of every day, the inspection team will hold a meeting. The lead inspector will inform the local authority. It is for the local authority to decide who attends the meeting. Typically, the meeting will include the DCS and senior managers responsible for children's services. The local authority may also want to commissioner to attend the feedback as an observer. The Ofsted regional director may also attend. The lead inspector will give the DCS and the local the authority and senior leaders feedback on what they have seen. This will be recorded.

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 inspection team will inform the local authority. The local authority will share information and whether it will resolve audit any cases.

Roles and expectations of inspectors

The Ofsted inspection team will include inspectors from Ofsted and CQC inspectors. In all inspections, all inspectors work collaboratively on all aspects of the scope of the inspection. Inspectors will share information, and the lead inspector will make the overall judgements. Inspectors will be familiar with the local authority's children's services and partnership arrangements.

Inspectors will:

- have the knowledge and skills to evaluate the local authority's children's services and partnership arrangements
- demonstrate a commitment to equality and diversity
- ensure that we have a proportionate and evidence-based impact of practice and how the local authority is working with children
- keep the impact of our work on children and young people at the forefront of our work
- ensure that we have a proportionate approach to our work

The team will meet for an extended period on the penultimate day on site 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 and evaluating evidence

Almost all inspection evidence will be gathered by looking at individual children and young people's experiences. The lead inspector will familiarize with practitioners to understand the nature and impact of their work with children and young people and their families and carers.

We take into account feedback from children and young people and commissioners during inspections. We recognize that even slight programs in a particular area can have a significant impact on the lives of children and their families and carers. We also recognize that some children, young people, and families experiences of trauma, abuse or neglect. Inspectors will not always ask children and young people to talk about their experiences if they think it might be damaging to their well-being.

Evaluating individual children's records that have always been audited by the local authority is not a priority. It is for the local authority to evaluate the local authority and target their evidence gathering. If the local authority's evaluation is not robust, inspectors will need to do more work to understand the further primary evidence of what it means for children.

When evaluating individual children's experiences, inspectors will not grade individual cases.

If statutory functions have been delegated, the inspectors will evaluate the impact of these functions on children and young people. If the local authority where functions have not been delegated, the inspectors will evaluate the delegation functions, see the section on alternative delivery models.

When inspectors review children and young people's experiences they will evaluate. They will take into account the factors set out below:

- the quality of practice
- children at risk from direct harm, including from abuse, exploitation and neglect, inspectors will also want to identify those children and young people who are at risk of being harmed but who are not known to children's services. We also want to know what the local authority knows about those who have been missing from care, home and education. These children must be part of the local authority's strategic planning
- educational achievement and attainment
- types of placement, including out of area placements, kinship care or connected person' accommodation, and placements with parents, including those subject to Children Care Proceeding, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2021
- at least 1 child's journey in care
- children and young people supported by a third party provider operating under a contract with the local authority. We will also want to see how the local authority has made sure that children and young people receive services for further information on delegated functions, see the section on alternative delivery models.

The lead inspector will take into account the local authority's self-assessment and strong on the in particular children and young people who are identified as being in need of help and protection, looked after children, care leavers and children subject to private law proceedings.

It is important that inspectors examine good practice as part of the inspection. We encourage local authorities to share with us what they think are the strongest good practice that it has identified through local case audit activity.

In evaluating children and young people's experiences, inspectors will test the following:

- early help – including early help assessments
- care and assessment
- children in need
- children subject to the investigation and for a plan)
- continuing help and support for families
- children in care proceedings
- the decision to remove
- permanence planning
- matching and placement decisions, including work to support return home to their family
- care leavers
- services to support and prepare for contemporary practice. This will usually be practice in the Ofsted inspection of local authority Trust. Inspectors will evaluate practice from before this to understand a child's journey.

Judgements are based on the impact on children and young people and the child's or young person's current situation, although inspectors will need some evidence of practice from before the current situation to understand what this implies for the current situation.

If cases files are already in good shape, the lead authority should arrange for inspectors to access the local authority's case management system. Inspectors will need to have access to the system for 2 weeks before they are needed for the fieldwork working with the child and family.

Inspectors will review a sample of cases from the previous 3 months (when appropriate), including those related to the sample of children and young people.

Protecting personal data

During inspections and visits, inspectors will gather personal information that is necessary to fulfill the statutory purpose of the inspection. We collect only 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.

Hearing the views of children and young people and their families

There are various opportunities to hear the views of children, young people and their families. Inspectors will use these wherever possible. These include:

- direct meetings – for example, meetings with children and young people are looking at closure
- Ofsted online questionnaire – for example, from the Children in Care Council
- views expressed by others advocating for children in care and care leavers, including independent reviewing officers
- views directly recorded on logs and recordings
- views expressed by practitioners
- views expressed by those advocating for children, young people and their families
- analysis of the annual questionnaire, including those from children in care and care leavers, and their parents and carers
- summary complaints data

Inspectors will look to children and young people wherever possible during the inspection, although they will not necessarily meet with every child. When talking to or about children or young people, inspectors are interested in understanding their experiences of services and how they are being supported by the local authority and partnership. Inspectors will also want to hear the views of children or charters in practice.

Inspectors will promote the local authority with guidance to help prepare children, young people, carers and families to be involved in the inspection. Inspectors will also want to know what the local authority has done to make sure children and their involvement in the inspection minimizes any potential disruption with them about their experiences. We have published 2 documents with the DCS and Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services for children and families when their involvement in inspections and visits means.

Inspectors will discuss any risks or ethical issues concerned with meeting children and young people. Inspectors will use their professional judgment and advice.

Inspectors will work with agencies to ensure that any child or young person with communication difficulties or disabilities has the opportunity to facilitate feedback that involvement in the inspection.

Inspectors will also want to hear the views of those in consultation with all children and young people who are in care, care leavers, children in need and their parents and families. We will want to see how feedback has been sought from children and young people who are in care, care leavers, children in need and children.

During a standard or short inspection, an inspector may meet with a group of foster carers, either a representative group or a group identified through an invitation to meet the inspection team.

Documentation

The inspection team will review the documentation requested in Annex A. Inspectors will also review the local authority's self-assessment. In Annex A, it includes documents that the local authority has made available. Inspectors must be clear why it believes the information is relevant to the inspection. The inspection team will not ask for information that is not relevant to the inspection as part of the inspection evidence.

Where inspectors are seeking further information

We sometimes have to ask for further information. This may be about a service or strategy or about an individual child's experiences.

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 make a judgement. It may be because we want to see a child's journey. For example, the inspection team may want to see what information or it may not have been recorded by the local authority. After the local authority has provided information, inspectors will need to see how it has been used to make decisions and how it has reduced the potential risk of harm to the child or young. They look seen. In some cases, requests for further information arise from inspection activity.

At the start of the inspection, the lead inspector will discuss with the DCS and inspectors for further information and share this with the DCS. The lead inspector will ask the DCS to make sure they are responsible for information the record.

Engaging with leaders and staff

Interviews with practitioners, managers and stakeholders

Inspectors will transparent evidence to talking to practitioners and/or managers. Inspectors will also want to talk to other stakeholders and partners. Inspectors will provide an overall list of the practitioners and managers they intend to meet with. Inspectors will also want to talk to the practitioners and managers of other agencies and partners. The lead inspector will discuss with the local authority and partners the best way to arrange these meetings. Inspectors will also want to discuss the meetings if this is the only way to triangulate evidence and is based on broad and representative samples.

When talking to practitioners and managers, inspectors will want to ask questions about a range of issues, for example:

- the quality and consistency of practice and management oversight
- the ways in which they are helped to strengthen families and minimize risk of harm to children and young people
- the availability, quality and effectiveness of services, including early help opportunities
- the ways in which the quality of multi-agency training and the development of practice and partnership arrangements are supported

Inspectors will usually speak about these issues alone with social workers. They may ask for to meet with other practitioners and managers.

If these individuals are not available, inspectors may look to those who are deputising for them or who are acting up.

If local authorities are in a process of reform or implementing an improvement plan, the lead inspector will discuss with the DCS how inspectors will evaluate this. This is likely to be reflected in the report, particularly the impact of leaders on frontline social work practice.

Statutory guidance states that the DCS and lead member should provide a "clear and challenging vision for children and young people in their area." The DCS should report to the lead member and chief executive. The lead member should report to the council leader or mayor on the statutory will ensure.

Inspection of the corporate and strategic leadership

The lead inspector will inform the DCS or another member of the senior staff of the inspection team's intention to meet with them. The DCS may want to be accompanied by other senior officers or lead members, which inspectors will agree to. The team. This gives the local authority the opportunity to challenge or correct factual inaccuracies. The DCS may want to be accompanied by other senior officers or lead members, which inspectors will agree to. The DCS is known that the DCS for the daily meeting or be issued by the lead inspector to the DCS.

Inspection of the corporate and strategic leadership

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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.

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

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 its experience of local authority performance and get its perspective on the local family justice system.

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.

We will not make judgements about family justice partner organisations or the judiciary in the report, but may report system-wide strengths and weaknesses.

The range of information gathered will vary according to the lines of enquiry in each area and will be proportionate.

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 quality of the local authority's legal advice and representation
- the appropriate allocation of requests for section 7 reports to Cafcass or the local authority

A note on the last point above: when a court is considering any question with respect to a child under the Children Act 1989, it can 'ask' a Cafcass officer or a local authority to report to the court. These often relate to questions like where a child should live or with whom they should have contact in circumstances when parents are divorcing or separating. A national protocol between Cafcass and ADCS states that if the child is in 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. The protocol, called 'Determining whether Cafcass or a LA should prepare a s7', is available under Cafcass/ADCS good practice guidance.

Recording evidence

Throughout an inspection or visit, inspectors will maintain a record of the evidence they gather. The record will include their individual and team analysis of the evidence. Inspectors may use an electronic recording system for this.

Each inspector will maintain records of the evidence they gather throughout the inspection. Inspectors must record the source, date and time of the evidence they gather. If the local authority provides any evidence on paper that is essential to the inspection, the inspector will ask it to add electronic copies to the online portal.

The lead inspector must allocate time for team inspectors to analyse their record and add individual evaluative summaries to the team's shared evidence record.

Inspectors should meet at least once a day to discuss their individual findings and record shared evaluative summaries. These shared summaries will usually draw on findings from multiple sources of evidence gathered by more than one inspector – they are essential for underpinning feedback at keep-in-touch (KIT) meetings, judgements and the inspection report.

Evaluative summaries must set out the inspector's or team's view about the quality, effectiveness and extent of practice. They should not simply describe the practice that is in place. A 3-part structure can help to achieve summaries that are clear, concise and inform judgements and reporting effectively:

- 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 difference this makes for children and young people

Inspectors should always consider and record what the evidence about practice with children and families tells them about the impact of local authority leaders.

When considered as a whole, the team's shared evaluative summaries must cover the scope of the inspection or visit and be clearly linked to the relevant headings in the evaluation criteria. They must reflect strengths and areas for improvement found across the scope. However, the number of summaries is less important than their quality.

All inspectors are responsible for reviewing the evidence record to identify gaps and make sure that the record is of good quality. The lead inspector will decide when sufficient evidence has been recorded about an issue so that it can be closed.

Inspectors should record individual summaries in the evidence record if they have serious concerns about the safety and welfare of a child that the local authority does not appear to be aware of and/or is not responding to appropriately. This may lead to a request for additional information, which inspectors should record.

Inspectors should also record summaries of examples of outstanding practice.

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.

The quality assurance manager will review the evidence record and challenge the team's findings to make sure that the 2 align. They will add their analysis to the evidence record, which may include recommending areas for further investigation by the inspection team.

Finalising evidence

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.

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 if the inspection team concludes that the evidence overall sits most appropriately with a finding of good. This is what we describe as 'best fit'.

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.

Before formal feedback at the end of a standard or short inspection, the lead inspector and quality assurance manager will usually inform the DCS of the provisional judgements from the inspection.

Feedback at the end of the inspection/visit

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.

Senior leaders are invited to engage in this final discussion about the evidence supporting the provisional findings and/or judgements to:

- understand the evidence that the team used to reach findings and/or judgements to support improvement (for local authorities judged to be good, this includes understanding the factors that kept them from being judged 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

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 is an opportunity for dialogue with senior leaders to help them understand the findings and not just a scripted presentation by inspectors. The meeting will usually last no longer than 60 minutes. Inspectors will not have produced a written report or letter at this stage of the inspection.

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.

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 making a complaint.

Engaging children's services commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State for Education

At the time of an inspection or visit, a commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State for Education may be reviewing action taken by the local authority to secure improvement to children's services. This is usually in a local authority that is having a monitoring visit or re-inspection because it was judged to be inadequate at its previous inspection. The commissioner is an important stakeholder.

Ofsted will contact the DCS to announce the inspection or visit. The local authority should inform the commissioner and any other relevant partners. Ofsted will also inform the DfE that an inspection or visit has started. The DfE would also inform the commissioner.

The lead inspector should contact the commissioner for their view of the action taken by the local authority to improve. This will usually be in the week before fieldwork. The lead inspector will use the commissioner's information to refine their lines of enquiry, not as primary evidence.

It is for the local authority to decide whether the commissioner should attend the feedback meeting. If a commissioner does attend, this will be as an observer.

In some circumstances, the commissioner may be providing or facilitating direct improvement support to the local authority in addition to their role reviewing services for the Secretary of State for Education. For example, if the commissioner is employed by a local authority or organisation delivering children's services, they may offer peer support and challenge through members of their own children's services team. If this is the case, the guidance above still applies. It remains the responsibility of the local authority to carry out its statutory functions and demonstrate what it is doing to improve children's experiences and progress, even when it is delivering this with support or in partnership with others.

Inspection reports and letters

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

Type of inspection	Type of report
Standard inspection	Inspection report with judgements on the Ofsted 4-point scale Plus, a standalone summary written for children and young people
Short inspection	Inspection report with judgements on the Ofsted 4-point scale Plus, a standalone summary written for children and young people
Focused inspection	Letter setting out narrative findings about strengths and areas to improve
Monitoring visit	Letter setting out narrative findings about strengths and areas to improve We do not usually publish a letter after the first monitoring visit, unless this is the second set of monitoring visits for a local authority.

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.

Reports/letters should:

- be concise, evaluative documents, written in clear, straightforward language and be 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

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:

1. What do we know about the overall experiences of children living in this local authority?
2. To what extent do leaders know about the quality of frontline practice?
3. How well do they support practice to help it stay or become good?
4. What has changed for children since the last inspection?

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.

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.

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

After each standard and short inspection, we will provide a summary of the inspection findings for children and young people. This document will be separate from the main report.

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 it helps, protects and cares for.

Writing the report/letter

When identifying the things that need to improve most, inspectors must ensure that these are 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 to 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.

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.

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 – inspectors should include this in the report. On short and standard inspections, we will always report findings about the experiences and progress of care leavers.

Reports following a standard or short inspection should be no more than 10 pages.

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. This includes the effectiveness of the contract management and quality assurance arrangements, as defined by The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (Relevant Care Functions) (England) Regulations 2014.

Clearing and publishing inspection reports and letters

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.

Local authorities will be given an opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the report/letter before we publish it.

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.

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

Quality assurance

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.

Quality assurance arrangements will be flexible and proportionate depending on the type of inspection activity carried out. 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

After a standard or short inspection, the local authority should write an action plan that responds to the findings in the report. It must submit its action plan to us at ProtectionOfChildren@ofsted.gov.uk within 70 working days of receiving the final inspection report. The requirement for this is set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007.

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 it shares its self-evaluation in preparation for the next annual engagement meeting.

If a focused visit results in an area for priority action, the local authority should submit an action plan that responds to the priority action within 70 working days of receiving the final focused visit letter. We will also ask that the local authority share a draft of its action plan within 20 working days of receiving the focused visit letter. This is so we can be assured that the local authority is taking action with an urgency commensurate with the seriousness of the findings.

The local authority does not need to submit an action plan to us after a monitoring visit.

Complaints

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.

If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a formal complaint can be raised under our complaints procedure.

Sharing information with other inspectorates

We share the final version of our local authority reports with our partner inspectorates under embargo until the report is published. Our partner inspectorates are the CQC, HMICFRS, HMIP, HMI Prisons and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate.

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.

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.

If inspection evidence suggests that there are weaknesses in practice in other providers or agencies that we regulate or inspect, inspectors will record this to inform future inspections of those providers/agencies.

Alternative delivery models and delegation of local authority functions

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

This section provides information about inspections when a local authority has delegated statutory functions to a third-party provider – an alternative delivery model.

In these circumstances (with the exception of arrangements under section 497A(4AA) of the Education Act 2006), the inspection is still an inspection of the local authority. This is because the third party is acting as the local authority's agent.

Local authority functions

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.

Relevant care functions are those functions set out in section 1(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 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 for Education

Under section 497A(4) of the Education Act 1996, the Secretary of State for Education 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 for Education) 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.

If the Secretary of State for Education 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 for Education'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, no such directions have been made.

Judgements about leadership when there are alternative delivery models

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.

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 it fulfils its role as the corporate parent
- in cases where the third-party provider is responsible for managing local authority partnerships, the provider is engaged with partner organisations to ensure that their responsibilities are carried out 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

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

Action plans when there are alternative delivery models

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 that are not the responsibility of the ADM/trust (for example governance, relationship with trust, scrutiny function and 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, if there is any disagreement, these areas must be set out.

If the KSPI Forum has been created at the direction of the Secretary of State Education, the parent carer representatives for the Secretary of State to enable the issues to be addressed through the appropriate route.

Evaluation criteria and grade descriptors

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

Overall effectiveness

Inspectors will determine the overall effectiveness grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate) on the basis of what they have seen about each area of the inspection.

- the extent of good practice across the service
- the extent and quality of the impact they have on inspection
- whether areas for improvement have been identified and the extent to which leaders and managers have addressed them.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Ofsted's ability to deep dive for subject guidance. Ofsted's description of what good looks like.

Evaluation criteria	Description
Children	Children, young people and their families are offered services that meet their needs and help them to achieve the outcomes they need. They know who to turn to when they need help and are confident that they will be listened to and their views taken into account.
Identifying children and families who need help and protection	Children and family members identified and assessed to need help and protection are those who most need the intervention of children's services, compared with other children and families who have similar characteristics and who live in similar circumstances. Children who are at risk of harm are identified and their needs are met. Children who are in need are identified and their needs are met. Children who are in need of protection are identified and their needs are met. Children who are in need of protection and who are looked after are identified and their needs are met. Children who are in need of protection and who are looked after are identified and their needs are met.
Children who need help and protection	Children and family members receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Parenting and family support	Children and their families receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children and young people who are missing from home, care or education	Children and young people who are missing from home, care or education are identified and their needs are met. Children and young people who are missing from home, care or education are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children and young people who are being sexually exploited	Children and young people who are being sexually exploited are identified and their needs are met. Children and young people who are being sexually exploited are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are at risk from the behaviour of others	Children who are at risk from the behaviour of others are identified and their needs are met. Children who are at risk from the behaviour of others are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are at risk from their own behaviour	Children who are at risk from their own behaviour are identified and their needs are met. Children who are at risk from their own behaviour are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in need of protection	Children who are in need of protection are identified and their needs are met. Children who are in need of protection are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are looked after	Children who are looked after are identified and their needs are met. Children who are looked after are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in need of protection and who are looked after	Children who are in need of protection and who are looked after are identified and their needs are met. Children who are in need of protection and who are looked after are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Leaving care services	Children who are leaving care are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Adoption services	Children who are adopted and their families receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Fostering services	Children who are fostered and their families receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Residential care homes	Children who are in residential care homes receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in secure children's homes	Children who are in secure children's homes receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in other residential settings	Children who are in other residential settings receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in independent living	Children who are in independent living receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in private fostering arrangements	Children who are in private fostering arrangements receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in other arrangements	Children who are in other arrangements receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in other arrangements and who are looked after	Children who are in other arrangements and who are looked after receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after and who are leaving care	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after and who are leaving care receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.

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

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

This judgement is likely to be judged great if the following apply:

Evaluation criteria	Description
Strategy, leadership and management	The leadership of the council, including the chief executive, lead member and other members and the DCS recognise and promote the importance of children's services and provide the resources to ensure that children and families receive services that are of good quality.
	The multiagency partnership, including the local authority and its partners, has a clear and shared vision for improvement and the leadership of local youth and the leadership of the local authority and its partners promotes the importance of children's services and provides the resources to ensure that children and families receive services that are of good quality.
	Strategies for improvement are based on a clear understanding of the needs of children and families, including, the ethnic, culture, Gypsy and Roll family, sexual, disabled and other minority groups in the local authority area, and on a clear understanding of what is working well and what needs to improve.
	The local authority's and other, strong commitment corporate parenting – in line with its responsibilities as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan – is evidenced by the quality of the services provided to children and young people who are looked after, care leavers, children who are in need of protection, children who are in need, children who are missing from home or education, and children who are at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and, in particular, sexual exploitation, child and family..
Learning	The local authority and its partners have a clear understanding of the quality of its services for children and families, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area.
	The local authority has a clear and robust system for ensuring that it and its partners learn from practice and from the views of children and families, and that it uses this learning to make improvements to services for children and families.
Resourcing	Staffing and training of adequate and good quality of the council children's services and other services for children and families, including those provided by the voluntary and independent sectors, is sufficient to meet the needs of children and families in the local authority area.
	The local authority's social care workforce is sufficient, suitably qualified and competent to meet the needs of children and families in the local authority area. Performance and competence of staff is monitored and supervised and supported by managers and leaders. Staff are supported by a well-managed, well-trained workforce, and by a well-managed, well-trained workforce in other services for children and families. Staff are supported by a well-managed, well-trained workforce that is committed to the overall quality and impact of social work practice.
	The Director of Children's Services and other senior managers and leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of the workforce, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families and staff, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area.
Responding to vulnerable children and families	The local authority and its partners have a clear understanding of the needs of children and families in the local authority area, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area.
	The local authority and its partners have a clear and robust system for ensuring that children and families receive services that are of good quality and that meet their needs, including those who are in need of protection, those who are looked after, care leavers, children who are in need, those who are missing from home or education, and those who are at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and, in particular, sexual exploitation, child and family.
Performance management and quality assurance	The local authority and its partners have a clear understanding of the quality of its services for children and families, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area.
	The local authority and its partners have a clear and robust system for ensuring that it and its partners learn from practice and from the views of children and families, and that it uses this learning to make improvements to services for children and families.
Inadequate	The leadership of the council, including the chief executive, lead member and other members and the DCS does not recognise and promote the importance of children's services and does not provide the resources to ensure that children and families receive services that are of good quality.
	The multiagency partnership, including the local authority and its partners, does not have a clear and shared vision for improvement and the leadership of local youth and the leadership of the local authority and its partners does not promote the importance of children's services and does not provide the resources to ensure that children and families receive services that are of good quality.
	The local authority's and other, strong commitment corporate parenting – in line with its responsibilities as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan – is evidenced by the poor quality of the services provided to children and young people who are looked after, care leavers, children who are in need of protection, children who are in need, children who are missing from home or education, and children who are at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and, in particular, sexual exploitation, child and family.
	The local authority and its partners do not have a clear understanding of the quality of its services for children and families, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area.
	The local authority and its partners do not have a clear and robust system for ensuring that it and its partners learn from practice and from the views of children and families, and that it uses this learning to make improvements to services for children and families.
	The local authority's social care workforce is sufficient, suitably qualified and competent to meet the needs of children and families in the local authority area. Performance and competence of staff is monitored and supervised and supported by managers and leaders. Staff are supported by a well-managed, well-trained workforce, and by a well-managed, well-trained workforce in other services for children and families. Staff are supported by a well-managed, well-trained workforce that is committed to the overall quality and impact of social work practice.
	The Director of Children's Services and other senior managers and leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of the workforce, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families and staff, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area.
Requires improvement	The leadership of the council, including the chief executive, lead member and other members and the DCS recognises and promotes the importance of children's services and provides the resources to ensure that children and families receive services that are of good quality, but there are some areas for improvement.
	The multiagency partnership, including the local authority and its partners, has a clear and shared vision for improvement and the leadership of local youth and the leadership of the local authority and its partners promotes the importance of children's services and provides the resources to ensure that children and families receive services that are of good quality, but there are some areas for improvement.
	The local authority's and other, strong commitment corporate parenting – in line with its responsibilities as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan – is evidenced by the good quality of the services provided to children and young people who are looked after, care leavers, children who are in need of protection, children who are in need, children who are missing from home or education, and children who are at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and, in particular, sexual exploitation, child and family, but there are some areas for improvement.
	The local authority and its partners have a clear understanding of the quality of its services for children and families, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area, but there are some areas for improvement.
	The local authority and its partners have a clear and robust system for ensuring that it and its partners learn from practice and from the views of children and families, and that it uses this learning to make improvements to services for children and families, but there are some areas for improvement.
	The local authority's social care workforce is sufficient, suitably qualified and competent to meet the needs of children and families in the local authority area. Performance and competence of staff is monitored and supervised and supported by managers and leaders. Staff are supported by a well-managed, well-trained workforce, and by a well-managed, well-trained workforce in other services for children and families. Staff are supported by a well-managed, well-trained workforce that is committed to the overall quality and impact of social work practice, but there are some areas for improvement.
	The Director of Children's Services and other senior managers and leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of the workforce, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families and staff, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The leadership of the council, including the chief executive, lead member and other members and the DCS does not recognise and promote the importance of children's services and does not provide the resources to ensure that children and families receive services that are of good quality.
	The multiagency partnership, including the local authority and its partners, does not have a clear and shared vision for improvement and the leadership of local youth and the leadership of the local authority and its partners does not promote the importance of children's services and does not provide the resources to ensure that children and families receive services that are of good quality.
	The local authority's and other, strong commitment corporate parenting – in line with its responsibilities as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan – is evidenced by the poor quality of the services provided to children and young people who are looked after, care leavers, children who are in need of protection, children who are in need, children who are missing from home or education, and children who are at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and, in particular, sexual exploitation, child and family.
	The local authority and its partners do not have a clear understanding of the quality of its services for children and families, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area.
	The local authority and its partners do not have a clear and robust system for ensuring that it and its partners learn from practice and from the views of children and families, and that it uses this learning to make improvements to services for children and families.
	The local authority's social care workforce is sufficient, suitably qualified and competent to meet the needs of children and families in the local authority area. Performance and competence of staff is monitored and supervised and supported by managers and leaders. Staff are supported by a well-managed, well-trained workforce, and by a well-managed, well-trained workforce in other services for children and families. Staff are supported by a well-managed, well-trained workforce that is committed to the overall quality and impact of social work practice.
	The Director of Children's Services and other senior managers and leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of the workforce, based on a wide range of information, including the views of children and families and staff, and knowledge of what it means to be a child in the local authority area.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

This area is likely to be judged great if the following apply:

Evaluation criteria	Description
Children and young people who need care and support	Children and young people who need care and support are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children and young people who need care and support are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who need care and support are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.
Children who need care and support who are looked after	Children who need care and support who are looked after are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children who need care and support who are looked after are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who need care and support who are looked after are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.
Children who need care and support who are looked after and who are in need of protection	Children who need care and support who are looked after and who are in need of protection are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children who need care and support who are looked after and who are in need of protection are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who need care and support who are looked after and who are in need of protection are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.
Leaving care services	Children who are leaving care are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children who are leaving care are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who are leaving care are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.
Children who are in other arrangements	Children who are in other arrangements receive services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children who are in other arrangements are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who are in other arrangements are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.
Children who are in other arrangements and who are looked after	Children who are in other arrangements and who are looked after are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children who are in other arrangements and who are looked after are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who are in other arrangements and who are looked after are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.
Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.
Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.
Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after and who are leaving care	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after and who are leaving care are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings. Services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, gender, language, sexual orientation, and family circumstances of children and their families.
Requires improvement	Children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after and who are leaving care are offered services that are sufficient to meet their needs, are of a good quality, and are delivered in a way that is sensitive to their needs and feelings, but there are some areas for improvement.
Inadequate	The experiences and progress of children who are in other arrangements and who are in need of protection and who are looked after and who are leaving care are in danger of being significantly harmed because of the poor quality of the services provided to them.

Guidance on inspecting local authorities that are part of a regional adoption agency

An RAA in itself is not a separate legal entity. Ofsted does not have powers to inspect the governance of the RAA as a separate entity. Ofsted will inspect the local authority area covered by the RAA to determine the quality of the local authority's responsibilities (sourced when a group of local authorities has set up a regional adoption agency (RAA) to carry out the local authority's duel – see the frequently asked questions later in this strategy).

On inspection

The LSCS Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance outline how we evaluate the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support of adoptive parents, including those who are recruited and assessed when inspecting local authority adoption services.

If groups of local authorities and RAAs work together in an RAA to improve their adoption services, we will include in our inspections of local authorities how the arrangements comply with their statutory responsibilities and meet children's needs. We will also include in our inspections of local authorities the performance of adoption services, including those provided by other agencies, in the local authority area.

If a local authority's part of an RAA inspection will utilised as the planning and preparation for adoption services inspection framework. Ofsted's local authority is required to have an agency decision maker. In some local authorities, the agency decision maker is shared with the RAA. We will inspect stages in the joint arrangements between the local authority and the RAA to assess the effectiveness of the agency decision maker. We have the rights to access information from the RAA and to interview staff and members of the RAA board as part of our inspection.

We will seek assurance that there is a sufficient and suitable pool of adopters for the local authority's children. We will also inspect the local authority's choosing whether it children are waiting to be placed and how quickly they are placed. We will also inspect how the local authority and its RAA ensure that children who are waiting to be placed are kept safe and receive the support they need while they wait to be placed.

If any of the local authority's children are placed for adoption, inspectors will look at the quality and effectiveness of the adoption support offered to these specific cases in up to 4 cases. A social care regulatory inspector will do this inspection at the same time as the inspection of the RAA. We will also look at how the local authority and its RAA ensure that there is a sufficient pool of adopters.

It remains the local authority's responsibility to demonstrate how the individual needs of children are met when the plan is adoption, even though they no longer have responsibility for the RAA.

Inspectors will look at the extent to which the RAA is effective in the ways it access the records they need to see as part of the inspection of the local authority. Many RAAs are hosted by a local authority.

We are not inspecting the effectiveness of the RAA, but we do take into account the RAA's contribution to the local authority's services. We will also inspect how the local authority's children's services through the RAA ensure that whether the RAA meets the local authority's needs. We always look at this in the context of the local authority's children's services and we will take into account experiences of children in care and care leavers, including a wide range of information, including the range of options the local authority uses to provide placements for children in care, and how well the local authority's children's services support children in care.

If the RAA arrangements hinder children achieving permanence and/or other aspects of their care plans, we will report on this. We will also report on assurances from the local authority that the RAA is delivering its duties.

If the local authority being inspected is the host local authority for the RAA, we only focus on the local authority's duties and functions in the RAA and not the wider and substantive of adoptions for their children.

The DCS should notify the management team of the RAA that an inspection has started.

Evaluating practice and writing the report

If inspectors judge the quality of the RAA as inadequate, the RAA, however, we only evaluate what the local authority is doing for its children and how well it is using the RAA to meet its responsibilities. We will not evaluate the performance of the RAA as a separate entity. We will report on the RAA's governance and its improvement in meeting local need.

We do not share any findings with the RAA directly. Our inspection relationship is with the local authority.

The report should have or imply any broader evaluation of the performance of the RAA. We are not judging the performance of the RAA. The LSCS is an inspection of the local authority's children's services. We are not inspecting the RAA. We have to assess its impact on the local authority's children's services. We are one of any government 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. It is important that we report on the extent to the children that the local authority and its partners.

Whatever the local arrangements, we will ask whether there is a sufficient and appropriate supply of adoptive parents. We will also ask whether:

If these are fitting 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 shortcomings in the RAA, we will not report on the quality of the RAA and its strengths or weaknesses.

The evaluation of the quality of children's experiences, local authority oversight and leadership and RAA's role in it. We will report on the extent to which inspections will only look at the adoption year cases as identified by the lead inspector.

Frequently asked questions

Q: Should the RAA report with Ofsted?

The majority of RAAs will be several local authority services working together. Ofsted will inspect the local authority's duties in the RAA. The local authority therefore will report to Ofsted. Inspectors will look at the children that the local authority or other types of bodies (such as local adoption leading companies or not for profit organisations) have placed for adoption. Ofsted will report on the local authority's duties in the RAA, including how well the local authority's children's services support children in care and care leavers.

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

No. Ofsted will inspect the local authority's duties in the RAA. Ofsted will report on the local authority's duties in the RAA, including how well the local authority's children's services support children in care and care leavers.

Q: Under which Framework do we inspect these local authority children's services that are hosted by a neighbouring local authority? Do we inspect the RAA?

We inspect RAAs and the under the social care common inspection framework. We will inspect the local authority's children's services. We will look at the local authority's adoption services, including those provided by other agencies and the RAA, both frameworks will apply. The timing of inspections is these inspections will be coordinated with the relevant inspectorate.

Q: Can the local authority's children's services delegate the role of the independent reviewing officer?

The local authority's duty to appoint an independent reviewing officer is an offence in the governance office of the adoption service. The officer can sit in the RAA. The local authority's children's services. The local authority's children's services are responsible for the independent reviewing officer.

RAAs that have chosen to set up as a local authority trading company model must register as a RAA (see question above). For that reason, the business governance office of the adoption service. The independent reviewing officer.

Q: Should the RAA's governance office of the adoption service be Ofsted's point of contact?

In June the DfE published Regulation a review for Ofsted, which sets out how Ofsted will inspect the governance office of the adoption service.

Q: Should the governance office of the adoption service be Ofsted's point of contact?

Yes.

Guidance on LCSCS focused visits during the restart of routine inspection

Dear Director of Children's Services and Director of Adult Social Care Services, We wrote to you on 19 May 2020 to inform you of our plans to restart our programme of joint inspections because of COVID-19 (coronavirus). We said we would provide further information about our plans for LCSCS focused visits, which we now are pleased to do in this letter.

Ofsted's LCSCS focused visits provide assurance about the quality and impact of practice with children and families between inspections that are graded outstanding or good. We have been carrying out these visits remotely and appropriately to local authorities that have requested to be inspected without making a graded judgement on Ofsted's in-scope cycle.

We have been carrying out LCSCS focused visits remotely. We will carry out focused visits, children effectiveness and the Ofsted's Framework and Evaluation Framework, but authorities we can in this interim period receive the same level of scrutiny as all other local authorities.

How the focused visits will work

Focused visits usually centre on topic areas that identify particular service delivery and outcomes for children and families. We will discuss with you the topic area(s). The topic area(s) will inform how we will carry out our arrangements are that:

- they will have a clear scope, but with a particular focus on the quality of decision-making for children
- they will last for a period of up to 3 days in order to deem this broader scope and we will increase the number of cases to 4 cases (one RAA and 3 LCSCS)

As with our routine focused visits, our findings will inform decisions about what kind of inspection, if any, we will undertake next. We will also use the information in line with the principles set out in the interim duty of the LSCS inspection.

Focused visits will be for local authorities that have been monitoring visits had started before lockdown, we will have carried out their first monitoring visit and have plans for subsequent visits. We will not carry out focused visits to local authorities in Ofsted's cycle of inspection. We will not carry out focused visits to local authorities we are in this interim period receive the same level of scrutiny as all other local authorities.

Deferrals

Ofsted's inspectors will consider deferrals on a case-by-case basis. We will not carry out focused visits to local authorities that have had a recent inspection or are in the process of being inspected. We will not carry out focused visits to local authorities that have had a recent inspection or are in the process of being inspected. We will not carry out focused visits to local authorities that have had a recent inspection or are in the process of being inspected. We will not carry out focused visits to local authorities that have had a recent inspection or are in the process of being inspected.

Governance

The governance of focused visits will be the same as that of our routine inspections. We will inform you of our plans for each focused visit. We will also inform you of our findings and we will make it a national expectation for the lead children, young people and their families.

Reporting

We will publish a report on our website. We will also inform you of our findings and we will make it a national expectation for the lead children, young people and their families.

Feedback

We will seek feedback from children and families and from local authorities. We will also inform you of our findings and we will make it a national expectation for the lead children, young people and their families.

Inspection

We will inform you of our findings and we will make it a national expectation for the lead children, young people and their families.

Conclusion

Our focused visits will be for local authorities that have been monitoring visits had started before lockdown, we will have carried out their first monitoring visit and have plans for subsequent visits. We will not carry out focused visits to local authorities in Ofsted's cycle of inspection. We will not carry out focused visits to local authorities we are in this interim period receive the same level of scrutiny as all other local authorities.

Local authorities may request a deferral of a visit. We will decide whether a deferral should be granted in accordance with our policy.

Inspectors will take all reasonable steps to work within the arrangements that the local authority has put in place to manage the impact of COVID-19. The lead inspector will work with the local authority to ensure that, whenever possible, the visit can go ahead. We are working closely with the DfE and in line with current government guidelines.

Scope

These focused visits will evaluate the quality and impact of key decision-making in the following practice areas:

- help and protection
- children in care and care leavers
- impact of leaders

Help and protection

In the help and protection area, inspectors will evaluate:

- the effectiveness of the front door, with specific reference to any rise in and response to referrals, section 47 enquiries and strategy discussions
- the progress of children subject to child protection and child in need plans (those who have experienced abuse, neglect or exploitation)
- the progress of those recently stepped up or stepped down to early help and the exercise of thresholds

Children in care and care leavers

In the children in care and care leavers area, inspectors will evaluate:

- edge of care/pre-proceedings, particularly those subject to a letter before proceedings (under the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline, local authorities are required to write to parents setting out what needs to change if they are to avoid family court proceedings).
- the focus on physical and mental health of children in care and care leavers, including how the local authority has maintained contact with the child/care leaver and how they have facilitated contact with families
- placement decisions, including the quality of matching, particularly when sufficiency is a challenge

Impact of leaders

In the impact of leaders area, inspectors will evaluate:

- the quality assurance of practice and 'line of sight' to the quality and impact of practice with children and families
- management and workforce capacity, including responses to staff well-being
- the effectiveness of leaders in leading and contributing to multi-agency working that leads to effective social work practice

Focused visit arrangements

During the interim period, all focused visits will have the same scope and the methodology will follow the same principles. In keeping with ILACS principles, the lead inspector will determine any specific lines of enquiry or emphasis identified though the off-site analysis of data and information. They will take into account the context of the local authority, including the local impact of the pandemic.

Inspectors will need to look at what has happened for children and families in the 6 months before the visit to understand children's experiences. Ofsted's evaluation criteria, which sets out our description of good practice, will still apply. Our focus will be on child-centred practice that has been carefully risk assessed to result in the best possible decisions for children in the context of the pandemic locally. We are evaluating and seeking assurance about the quality and impact of practice within a challenging context, when circumstances may have resulted in decisions that may have been different to those taken in normal times. Inspectors will give credit to evidence of practitioners and managers doing the right thing for children in the circumstances.

Inspectors will want to understand how any of the changes to regulation set out in The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 have impacted on the experiences of children and families. This will include looking at management oversight.

We will give 10 working days' notice of the visit. The inspection team will usually be four social care HMI and one schools HMI. An Ofsted SHMI will be the quality assurance manager (QAM) for the visit.

Week 1 – notice period

Day	Activity
Tuesday	Notice given (morning) Set-up call (afternoon) Annex A request
Wednesday and Thursday	Opportunity for local authority to prepare for visit
Friday	Local authority shares child-level data and list of recently audited cases by close of play (COP)

Week 2 – off site analysis

Day	Activity
Monday	Local authority shares remainder of Annex A by COP Analysis by Ofsted senior analytical officer (SAO)
Tuesday	Lead inspector off-site evaluation/phone interviews Analysis by Ofsted SAO
Wednesday and Thursday	Lead inspector may call local authority staff to ask questions about Annex A, help develop lines of enquiry and plan the visit (for example, the lead member, chief executive or DCS)
Friday	Prepare team briefing

Week 3 – fieldwork

Day	Activity
Monday	Team off-site evaluation (any necessary travel)
Tuesday to Thursday	Fieldwork – primary evidence gathering
Friday	Lead inspector drafting focused visit letter

Notifying the local authority and requesting information

We usually carry out ILACS inspections and visits with 5 working days' notice. We will carry out these focused visits with 10 working days' notice to reflect the disruption that local authorities are experiencing. This will give the local authority more time to collate and provide the information requested.

The lead inspector will telephone the DCS 10 working days before fieldwork begins, at around 9.00am. The lead inspector will request the relevant information from Annex A and offer a more detailed call the same afternoon to set up the visit.

In addition to the usual matters covered at a set-up call, the lead inspector will:

- establish whether there have been any changes to strategic oversight since the start of the pandemic (for example, changes to promote pupil attendance at school, oversight of other child-protection arrangements, or changes to how children in care and care leavers have been supported)
- ask how the local authority has joined up schools and social care services while schools were closed, to minimise the risk of vulnerable pupils 'slipping through the net'
- explore how well informed senior leaders are about the work schools have been doing to safeguard pupils while not attending school (because of COVID-19 or because they were already missing from education)
- establish which offices are open, which staff are working in an office or from home and any changes in working practices

To minimise the burden on the local authority, the lead inspector will not usually contact the local authority after the set-up call until the second week. The local authority may contact the lead inspector in week 1 if it has queries or difficulties arise. Ofsted senior analytical officers will also be available to answer any questions the local authority may have about providing the information listed in Annex A.

Off-site evaluation

When the lead inspector notifies the local authority of the visit, they will request some of the information set out in Annex A.

We recognise that, due to COVID-19, local practice on recording may have been different to usual. The local authority should set out any differences for the lead inspector and Ofsted SAO in their submission, so that they can take this into account in their analysis.

For example, as schools re-open for all children, there may be increased numbers of children not in school due to parental fear of infection. Inspectors will need to understand if this cohort of children are captured in Annex A items 2.04 or 2.05 or elsewhere.

Week 1 – notice period

The lead inspector will give notice on Tuesday morning (day 1). They will offer a more detailed set-up call later that day.

By the end of Friday (day 4), the local authority shares child-level data lists 1 to 10 and a list of recently audited cases. The lead inspector will discuss what audit activity has occurred in recent months and agree the appropriate request with the DCS at the set-up call.

Week 2 – off site analysis

By the end of Monday (day 5), the local authority shares information it uses to manage its services. For more information on the items listed in the table below, see Annex A.

Area	Items needed (by Annex A number)
Impact of leaders	1.01 1.03 1.05 1.07 – for these visits, this may be a current position statement on staffing rather than a full workforce profile 1.13 – for these visits, if formal meetings have not taken place, we request your best evidence of how you have managed/maintained multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. 1.14
Help and protection	2.02 2.03 2.04 2.05
Children in care and care leavers	3.02 – for these visits, this may be the actual strategy or best evidence from the past 6 months 3.03 – for these visits, this may be the actual strategy or best evidence from the past 6 months 3.05 – for these visits, this may be the actual strategy or best evidence from the past 6 months 3.08 3.12

The off-site analysis will be mainly carried out by the lead inspector, who will prepare a briefing for the inspection team and identify tasks for team inspectors during their analysis day.

A senior analytical officer will analyse the child-level data and management information provided by the authority. This is to give the lead inspector an overview and assurance about decision-making points in the local authority. Their analysis will also include caseloads and children in unregistered/unregulated settings. They will also use the data to identify children whose experiences inspectors will evaluate.

Before fieldwork (in week 2), the lead inspector will engage the lead member for children's services, the chief executive and other children's social care specialist managers as necessary. They will talk with stakeholders, such as the local family judiciary, Cafcass, the Clinical Commissioning Group and local police service, when appropriate and when key officers are available.

The lead inspector will inform the local authority of which children's cases inspectors want to look at. This is so the local authority can arrange discussions with practitioners or the most suitable alternative professional during fieldwork.

Fieldwork (gathering primary evidence)

Inspectors are likely to carry out a mix of on-site and off-site evidence gathering. They will determine the balance between these on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the local context and working arrangements. The arrangements will be agreed as part of the set-up meeting. This may result in some of the team working remotely for the full duration of the visit. We will keep our practice under close and regular review to ensure that it reflects developments in government guidance and local authority practices.

Inspectors will use phone and video calls to speak to social workers. This will include using the screen-sharing function so that social workers can show examples of their work as if the inspectors were sitting with them.

At the set-up call, the lead inspector will explore how inspectors can access the local authority's wider integrated children's system (ICS). This could be by giving the inspectors remote access to their systems, couriering a laptop to an Ofsted office or, when this is not an option, at least one inspector visiting a local authority office to access the system.

Inspectors will use video calls to engage with groups of children, foster carers and/or residential care staff.

Role of the schools HMI

Schools HMI are usually deployed on standard and short (judgement) inspections and not on focused visits. However, for these focused visits, we have decided to deploy a schools specialist. They will add value to our evaluation at a time when schools will have re-opened for all pupils, and will play a critical role in providing early help and identifying 'hidden harm'.

Schools HMI will evaluate:

- the educational progress of children in care
- children missing education
- electively home-schooled children
- how the local authority has promoted school attendance
- partnership working between schools and the local authority
- the effectiveness of the virtual school
- the experiences of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET)

To carry out their evaluation, schools HMI may speak with children and their foster carers, care leavers, the virtual school headteacher and relevant staff at a sample of schools. These conversations may be individual or in groups. They may happen through both phone and video calls.

This will not be an inspection of the schools in an area, but inspectors may comment on the effectiveness of schools' work and partnership with the local authority both during and post-lockdown. The schools HMI will triangulate their findings with the findings of the social care inspectors.

Inspection findings

We will set out our findings in a letter following the focused visit. The letter may identify areas of strength and good practice and areas where improvement is needed most, in relation to the practice that 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 dates that we share the draft and final letter, we will write to the DCS to confirm this.

We will quality assure letters before we send a draft copy to the local authority. We may share the draft findings with other public bodies.

Local authorities will have 5 working days after we send the draft letter to comment on the draft report, inspection process and its findings. We will respond to the local authority's comments when we send the final letter to them. If the local authority wishes to submit a formal complaint, it will have 5 working days after we send the final version of the letter to do so.

We will usually publish the letter on our reports website 8 working days after we send the final version to the local authority. If the local authority submits a complaint within the deadline set out above, we will not publish the letter while we consider the complaint.

Timeline for writing the letters of findings

Activity	Timescales
Draft letter sent to local authority for any comments	10 working days after inspectors complete fieldwork
Local authority has 5 working days to return any comments about the findings and the inspection process	11 to 15 working days after fieldwork
Final version of the letter sent to the local authority (pre-publication, under embargo)	22 working days after fieldwork
Local authority has 5 working days if they wish to submit a complaint	23 to 27 working days after fieldwork
Letter published on Ofsted's reports website	30 working days after fieldwork

Conduct and complaints

Inspectors must uphold the highest professional standards in their work and treat everyone they encounter during visits fairly and with respect and sensitivity. Inspectors must at all times adhere to the code of conduct.

Any concerns and complaints during the visit will be handled in line with Ofsted's complaints policy. If the local authority wishes to submit a formal complaint, it will have 5 working days after we send the final version of letter to do so. If the local authority submits a complaint within the deadline, we will not publish the letter while we consider the complaint.

Post-inspection surveys

We will ask the local authority for its feedback after the visit through a survey. We will share details about how you can do so when we share the final letter with you.

Action plan after a focused visit

After a focused visit, updating the existing action and/or improvement plan from the previous inspection will be deemed sufficient for Ofsted's and the DfE's purposes. The local authority should send the updated action plan to us when it shares its self-evaluation in preparation for the next annual engagement meeting.

If a visit results in an area for priority action, the local authority should submit an action plan that responds to the priority action within 70 working days of receiving the final focused visit letter. We will also ask that the local authority shares a draft of its action plan within 20 working days of receiving the focused visit letter. This is so we can be assured the local authority is taking action with urgency commensurate to the seriousness of the findings.

Annex A: Information we request from the local authority

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.

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.

Information	Standard and short inspections	Focused visits	Monitoring visits
Information requested	All the information in Annex A	Only information relevant to the focus of the visit (The lead inspector will discuss this with the DCS at the start of the inspection.)	Only information relevant to the focus of the 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	One day after notification(by the end of Tuesday)	One day after notification (usually by midday Wednesday)	One day after notification (usually Tuesday)
Information about audits the local authority has completed in the 6 months before the inspection	One day after notification (by the end of Tuesday)	One day after notification (usually by midday Wednesday)	One 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)	One day after notification (usually by the end of Wednesday)	7 days after notification (usually the Wednesday before inspectors are on site)
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 on site)

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

The lead inspector will maintain a record of requests for further information.

Child-level data

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. The child-level data lists should be as up to date as possible. However, the local authority may provide lists that it has prepared in advance that show data up to the Wednesday before notification.

Please provide these lists in Excel.

Below is an outline of the broad contents of each list. Detailed guidance about the fields for each list is available in a spreadsheet. Included in the spreadsheet is an optional template for each child-level list.

To reduce the burden on local authorities, we have aligned the information within the child-level lists with DfE guidance on children looked after and children in need.

The spreadsheet template includes an overview of the ideal codes to use and how these link to the more detailed descriptions in the DfE guidance.

The child-level data lists should cover a period of 6 months before the date of notification.

The information we request

List number	Description
List 1	All contacts received in the 6 months before the date of inspection.
List 2	All early help assessments in the 6 months before the date of inspection. Also, current early help interventions that are being coordinated through the local authority.
List 3	All referrals received in the 6 months before the inspection.
List 4	All statutory assessment in accordance with section 17 or section 47 of the Children Act 1989 in the 6 months before the inspection.
List 5	All section 47 enquiries in the 6 months before the inspection.
List 6	All those in receipt of services as a child in need at the point of inspection or in the 6 months before the inspection (see template for more detail on the cohort to include).
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 6 months before the inspection.
List 8	All children in care at the point of inspection. Include all those children who ceased to be looked after in the 6 months before the inspection.
List 9	All those who are receiving leaving care services at the point of inspection.
List 10	All those children who, in the 12 months before the inspection, have: (a) been adopted (b) had the decision that they should be placed for adoption but they have not yet been adopted (c) had an adoption decision reversed during the 12 months
List 11	All those individuals who in the 12 months before the inspection have had contact with the local authority adoption agency for any of the following reasons: (a) prospective adopters at any stage of the adoption process (only include information about prospective adopters who have made an application; you do not need to include people who have only made enquiries) (b) prospective adopters who have made an application, even if they are being matched to children from another authority (c) prospective adopters who are no longer going through the process (for example, those who have chosen to withdraw from the process or have been refused)

It is likely that children will appear on more than 1 list. The consistent use of the child ID across lists will enable the lead inspector to recognise when this occurs.

For lists 6 to 10, please provide only 1 row for each unique child ID. Information should relate to the most recent event (for example, list 6 should show the most recent episode of need).

Some of the requested data – particularly in relation to list 1 'contacts' and list 2 'early help assessments' – may not be recorded on the local authority's main ICS system. 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.

If certain data is unavailable, we will ask the local authority to demonstrate how it has sufficient management oversight of the specific issue.

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 its management information systems.

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

The local authority should share a list of the audits that they have carried out in the 6 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, it should share this too.

Case file documents

The lead inspector will not ask the local authority to carry out audits specifically for the inspection. Before fieldwork, the lead inspector will identify 6 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.

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

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. If the reasons for sharing a particular piece of information are unclear or the lead inspector decides the information is not relevant to the scope of the inspection/visit, inspectors will not read it.

The local authority should provide the information below as soon as it is able to and by the deadlines set out at the beginning of Annex A.

Each of the topics is numbered. When the local authority shares the information with inspectors, it 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 its evidence to the topic.

Impact of leadership on social work practice with children and families

Item number	Text
1.01	Organisational structure showing lines of reporting and accountability (when 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, carried out in the last 12 months.
1.06	A sample of local authority and multi-agency practice audits of work with children in need, those at risk of significant harm and those who are looked after or care leavers carried out in the 6 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 carried out in the last 12 months.
1.09	The social work supervision policy and a list of all case-holding social workers, including the number of cases held on the date of notification. This should include a list of all workers' allocated cases, the number of open cases they held on the day of notification and their job title. Include the number of open cases unallocated on this date. If possible, please provide this information on an Excel spreadsheet. This list should be as up to date as possible. However, the local authority may provide a pre-prepared version showing the position up to the Wednesday before notification.
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.
1.14	Rapid reviews carried out following child safeguarding incident notifications in the 12 months before the inspection. You can find guidance on rapid reviews in chapter four 4 of 'Working together to safeguard children'.

Children in need of help and protection, including early help

Item number	Text
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 similar (for example, the common assessment framework), completed in the last 12 months and the number currently receiving a service through a team around the family.
2.02	Information about children missing from home or care and children suffering or at risk of sexual exploitation, and the services these groups of children receive. This should include: - a list of children who have been missing or at risk of sexual exploitation within the last 12 months, including the child unique ID for each child (in line with the ID used in the child-level lists). This should indicate the current status of each child (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 in understanding work done to reduce the risks to children from sexual exploitation and going missing and how this work is structured and delivered. - the most recent performance management and quality assurance information used to monitor and develop practice in these areas of work.
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 information the local authority uses to monitor the welfare of electively home educated children, in particular those children who are electively home educated and are either on a child protection plan, education, health and care (EHC) plan or are a child in need. If available, please provide the policy on elective home education.
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 the: - child unique ID or unique pupil number (UPN) and the date of birth. - type of educational provision that they are receiving, including home tuition. - number of hours of 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

Item number	Text
3.01	The strategic plan for children in care, the corporate parenting strategy/plan and the last 3 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 and any other relevant plans.
3.08	The data the headteacher of the virtual school 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).
3.13	The local authority's offer for care leavers.
3.14	A list of care leavers known to be living in houses in multiple occupation. This list may be up to 1 month before the date of notification.
3.15	Information about the recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers. This should include: - the local authority's register of foster carers. - the 3 most recent fostering panel minutes (if the local authority is part of a partnership arrangement to deliver its fostering services, this should be the most recent minutes that relate to children that the local authority is responsible for). - overview of training for foster carers and data about take-up/completion. - recruitment strategy for foster carers. - statement of purpose for the fostering service. - list of support groups run for foster carers
3.16	Information about the recruitment, assessment, training and support of adoptive carers: The local authority's list of adopters. The 3 most recent adoption panel minutes (if the local authority is part of an RAA, this should be the most recent minutes that relate to children that the local authority is responsible for). - overview of training for adopters and data about take-up/completion - recruitment strategy for adopters - statement of purpose for the adoption service - list of support groups run for adopters
3.17	The information the local authority uses to monitor which of its children are in unregulated provision. This should be a list of each child living in unregulated provision and include their unique ID, age, the date this provision started and details of the provision. The local authority may share a list that they created any time in the month before they are notified of the inspection.

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Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance and support

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