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> Inspection of children's social care providers > Inspections of fostering and adoption agencies

> Social care common inspection framework (SCCIF): independent fostering agencies raising standards improving lives

Guidance

### agencies Updated 19 March 2021 Contents

the most vulnerable children. This includes:

Assurance visits: independent fostering

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Introduction

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### • carrying out off-site activity, including risk assessments

• taking enforcement action, such as restriction of accommodation, suspension or cancellation • carrying out urgent visits when we have serious concerns about children

- As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are carrying out assurance visits to
- framework (SCCIF) as possible during the current inspection year (which ends on 31
- We will prioritise visits based on the most recent inspection judgements, other information we hold about the provider, the amount of time since the last inspection

We will prioritise the safety and welfare of everyone involved in the visits, including children, carers, staff and inspectors; we will follow the most up-to-date guidance from Public Health England.

Inspectors will be sensitive to the challenges presented by COVID-19; we will always

## The legal context

**Guiding principles** 

take that context into account.

Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Ofsted carries out its work in ways that encourage the services it inspects and/or regulates to:

improve be user-focused • be efficient and effective in the use of resources

is the registration authority for independent fostering agencies and other establishments and agencies to which Part 2 of that Act applies.

## the Act defines an independent fostering agency.

be found in the relevant section of the **SCCIF**.

Further information about the legal context of our inspection and regulatory activity can

- Length of visit
- The usual length of an assurance visit is 2 days for one inspector. This includes all offsite and on-site activity. The inspector has a further day to draft the report. A regional inspection manager (RIM) may agree that the length of the visit should be reduced for assurance visits to small agencies or increased for visits to larger agencies.

Report sent to the registered provider for any comments within 18 working days of the end of the visit

Provider may submit a formal complaint within 5 working days of the issue of the final report

The final report is published on the Ofsted reports website within 38 working days of the end of the

### Ofsted sends the final report to the provider within 30 working days of the end of the visit

visit

What happens

Visit announced and is 'live' immediately

Visit completed and verbal feedback given

Draft report completed and submitted for quality assurance

Day

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

onwards

Provider returns the report within 5 working days with any comments

Inspectors will use the following descriptors as the benchmarks against which to evaluate performance. Our findings, however, are not derived from a checklist. Some criteria will have less relevance than others in some settings because of the nature of the setting and the needs of the children and young people.
Inspectors will look for evidence of the following:
Children are well cared for
<ul> <li>Children have trusted and secure relationships with their foster carers.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Children are supported to keep in touch with family, friends and other people who are</li> </ul>
important to them.
<ul> <li>important to them.</li> <li>Children's views are understood and taken into account and their rights and entitlements are met.</li> </ul>

#### children. • Carers and staff understand the potential indicators and impact of abuse and

neglect, and respond appropriately.

practice, however complex their needs may be.

restrictions change are coherent and effective.

and managers; the 'flexibilities' permitted by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 or by any subsequent changes to regulations have only been used when absolutely necessary, and the rationale for these decisions are effectively recorded.

• Robust action is taken to address complaints or issues of concern.

• The fostering panel promotes safe, secure and stable placements.

• Leaders and managers actively use the findings from internal monitoring improve the experiences of children. • Positive partnerships are in place, for example with police, placing local authorities and schools.

• Plans for children are reviewed effectively and meet their individual needs; plans as

- Foster carers receive strong, individualised support, including effective training. • Foster carer reviews are robust and timely. • Leaders and managers have responded effectively to the requirements and recommendations made at the agency's last inspection.
- The start of the visit The inspector contacts the provider at approximately 9am on day 1 to announce beginning of the assurance visit. The visit is 'live' from the point of this call.

The inspector will always speak to the registered manager (or, if they are unavailable,

• arrange to interview the registered manager (or their deputy, if they are unavailable)

provide the opportunity to share any current information or personal issues relating

to any of the children or staff that the inspector needs to be aware of during the

inspection – in particular, the inspector should find out whether any staff, foster

the responsible individual) at the beginning of the visit to:

arrange access for the inspector/s to the agency's database

and no later than 12pm on the day of the announcement:

placed with carers, to facilitate case sampling

• outline the plan for the visit

during the visit

directors or trustees

given

the inspector.

assurance visit.

previous inspection report(s)

notifications of serious events

workers and other stakeholders

any concerns and complaints received

• the statement of purpose and children's guide

listening and talking to children and young people

• listening and talking to managers and staff

• gathering views of other professionals

listening and talking to foster carers

The end of the visit

Reporting our findings

concerns as a result of practice that:

**Feedback** 

necessary.

#### • a set of minutes and papers for the most recent panel • any changes to registration, including change of manager or the responsible individual

Evaluating the experiences of children looked after by the agency's carers is a core activity during the visit. This is largely based on evidence from case sampling. The detail of the inspector's activity will vary according to the lines of enquiry for each individual visit but is likely to include a combination of the following:

• examining records, policies and procedures when this is a key line of enquiry; during

the visit, inspectors will look at documents in order to follow a line of enquiry

observing activities, such as the panel or placement planning meetings

- The report will be published on Ofsted's reports website. Summary report for children Inspectors also complete a brief, child-friendly summary following every assurance visit
- Serious and widespread concerns: next steps Any serious or widespread concerns will lead to a post-visit debrief between the

We anticipate that the agency will translate the summary, if necessary, for those

children who speak English as an additional language and for those who use alternative

inspector and their manager as soon as possible, and then a case review. The timing of

The post-visit debrief should consider the evidence and consider a recommendation for

further action to take to the case review. The recommendation of further action should

The case review considers the recommended future action and allows the manager to

If concerns are serious, we are likely to return to carry out a monitoring visit within 6 to

8 weeks to check that the manager and responsible person have taken sufficient steps

address the scheduling of future inspections/visits and/or enforcement action. The

social care compliance handbook has detailed information about the enforcement

options available and the arrangements for following up enforcement activity.

to safeguard and protect the welfare of children. All monitoring visits result in a

the case review should be proportionate to the risk and certainly no later than 5

working days following the visit. The inspector sends an email to the directors of

published report.

### Yes No

Further guidance

• Ofsted's complaints procedure

Deferring inspections

Conduct during visits

• Use of personal data

• Incomplete visits

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19)** Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance and support

# Services and information

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There is something wrong with this page

**Brexit** 

Check what you need to do

Introduction Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. We have continued our regulatory work to help maintain social care provision for

• reviewing notifications from providers and other information we receive

• progressing applications for registration, variation and voluntary cancellation

Q

as many settings that are inspected under the social care common inspection March 2021).

and whether the provider is newly registered and therefore has not yet been inspected. This guidance is applicable from 1 September 2020.

We continue to be guided by existing <u>principles for inspection</u> as set out in the SCCIF.

Section 5 of the Care Standards Act 2000 provides that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector The Care Standards Act 2000 sets out our powers to register, inspect and where necessary enforce compliance with the Act and the relevant regulations. Section 4 of

**Timeframe** The usual timeframe from the announcement of the visit to publication:

The focus of assurance visits

#### Children are safe Risks are identified, understood and managed effectively. • Carers are well prepared and supported to respond appropriately to children who may go missing or may be at risk of harm. Carers are well prepared and supported to manage challenging situations and behaviour effectively. • Clear and consistent boundaries contribute to a feeling of well-being and security for

Leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership

• Managers and staff place the well-being of individual children at the centre of their

• Decisions to divert from usual practice during the COVID-19 outbreak are made in the

best interests of individual children and are appropriately overseen by senior leaders

Children's educational needs are identified and promoted effectively.

• Children have access to specialist help according to their individual needs.

#### • The staff team works collaboratively to provide consistency and stability for children. • Staff and managers receive strong, individualised support, including effective training and supervision.

- What happens during an assurance visit
- carers or children have been diagnosed with, or have symptoms of, COVID-19 ensure that Ofsted holds the correct details on the inspection database (as required by regulations), including email address and contact telephone numbers for the manager, registered provider and/or responsible individual, any other partners, or

• arrange the approximate time for any onsite activity and when verbal feedback will be

The inspector will request the following information to be available as soon as possible,

• updated data and details from the foster carers' register, including details of children

Following this call, the inspector will send the provider an email that confirms the practical arrangements for the visit and the information requirements.

The inspector will also share an email for the agency to circulate to foster carers,

There is likely to be a mixture of off-site and on-site activity. The timing and the

proportion of off-site and on-site activity are determined by the developing lines of

• completed questionnaires from children, parents, foster carers, placing social

In exceptional circumstances (for example, if we have serious concerns about the

immediate safety of children), we will arrive on site to announce the beginning of the

enquiry and by the information we already hold about the fostering agency, including:

informing them that the visit is being carried out and how they can give their views to

- Case sampling
- At the end of the visit, the inspector will give verbal feedback of the main findings. This feedback will usually be given to the registered manager or responsible individual.

Assurance visits will lead to a concise narrative report, with no graded judgement.

The report will clearly identify and describe any serious or widespread concerns.

The report will make <u>requirements and recommendations</u> for improvement, as

to an independent fostering agency. If we know that children need an adapted form of

summary, we will send the report to the provider with a request for the document to be

places children at risk of inadequate protection or significant harm

• leads to children's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted

Each report will clearly state whether inspectors identified any serious or widespread

adapted into a suitable format. If we know that children use individual, alternative systems of communication to verbal communication, or that children have limited receptive and expressive language skills, we still provide a child-friendly summary. It can be short, include pictures and be set in

simple, concrete sentences.

systems of communication.

decide which action to take.

- children's services in the relevant local authorities by the end of the next working day following the visit. The inspector follows this email up with a telephone call to ensure receipt. The inspector should also ensure that the email to local authorities is forwarded to the provider.
- **Post-visit surveys** Following visits, we will ask providers for feedback about the process through a survey. We use the feedback we receive to review and make improvements to how we work.

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**Driving and transport**