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Open consultation

# Social care common inspection framework review: interim inspections of children's homes and residential holiday schemes for disabled children

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The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people and in education and skills for learners of all ages.

## Purpose and background to the consultation

How Ofsted inspects children's homes and residential holiday schemes for disabled children (RHSDC) is set out in the [social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\)](#).

Our inspection approach is underpinned by the following 3 principles:

- to focus on the things that matter most to children's lives
- to be consistent in our expectations of providers
- to prioritise our work where improvement is needed most.

Following the amendments to the [Fees and Frequency Inspection Regulations](#), we are proposing some changes to our methodology for carrying out interim inspections of children's homes. These proposals consider our learning from carrying out assurance visits during the pandemic and making the best use of the most recent inspection judgement and the data and intelligence that we hold.

Having reviewed our current methodology for carrying out inspections of RHSDC, we are also proposing some changes to that. The changes we are proposing aim to reduce the burden on providers but maintain a focus on the safety and welfare of children attending the schemes.

## Children's homes

All children's homes receive at least one full inspection per year. Some children's homes must be inspected a second time within the same regulatory year. We currently call these 'interim inspections'. All secure children's homes and children's homes that are judged to be less than good must have a second interim inspection (with some exceptions in the regulations depending on the timing of the full inspection). We also carry out interim inspections of homes judged good and outstanding where we have received information that causes us concern. This exceeds our obligations under the Fees and Frequency Regulations.

In addition to full inspections and interim inspections, we currently use monitoring visits (a short one-day visit) to monitor compliance notices or other enforcement action, or to focus on one discrete issue. We do not propose to make any changes in the way we use monitoring visits.

Following an inadequate judgement, we return to the home within 6 to 8 weeks, or earlier if necessary, to ensure that children are safe. This is usually a further full inspection or a monitoring visit. If the home remains registered, we carry out a full inspection usually within 16 weeks from the original inspection, or earlier if necessary.

We do not propose to change the current approach in relation to children's homes that are judged inadequate, and we will continue to use monitoring visits as and when needed for all homes regardless of their judgement grade.

We are proposing to revise the purpose of an interim inspection of a children's home and how we carry them out to:

- provide assurance that the home has not declined since the full inspection
- ensure that children are well cared for and safe, and that leaders and managers are effective.

We propose to:

- provide a single judgement based on the inspection findings
- evaluate the effectiveness of any improvements leaders and managers have made since the last inspection
- replace 'interim' with a more meaningful name.

## **Residential holiday schemes for disabled children**

We currently regulate and inspect fewer than 20 holiday schemes. An RHSDC is run by volunteers who take disabled children away on holiday, usually for short breaks of a few nights. Each scheme is inspected every year.

To ensure that we remain focused on the arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children while having a proportionate approach to a scheme where children are on a short holiday, we propose to:

- update the language and emphasis in the SCCIF for RHSDC
- use a combination of on- and off-site inspection activities
- require schemes to provide a formal notification of the proposed date and location they will run from
- carry out an interview with the manager before the scheme starts.

## **The aim of the consultation**

The aim of this consultation is to gather the views of all professionals, providers, families, children, and volunteers who have an interest in children's homes and/or

holiday schemes.

We will use the responses to inform our new arrangements, which we aim to introduce from 1 April 2022. The consultation runs from 2 November 2021 to 24 January 2022.

A report on the outcome of the consultation will be published before 11 March 2022.

## **The SCCIF for children's homes in respect of interim inspection**

Until recently, we were required to inspect all children's homes at least once a year, and twice where the home had been judged requires improvement or inadequate in the previous inspection year. In September 2021, the regulations were amended. Though they still require us to inspect all children's homes at least once a year, the necessity to carry out a second (interim) inspection is now determined by the home's most recent judgement, rather than its judgement in the previous year.

Our existing methodology for carrying out interim inspections was based on the requirements of earlier iterations of the regulations, devised when every children's home received 2 inspections, irrespective of its previous inspection judgements.

Having reviewed our inspection activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, we wish to update the SCCIF methodology for carrying out interim inspections to make the best use of the most recent inspection judgement, data, and intelligence. We believe the changes will enable us to be more responsive and focused on children's progress and experiences, in order to ensure that children are safe and their welfare is supported. This is not about how often we inspect, but how we make the best of our inspection activity.

### **Proposal 1: provide a single judgement based on the interim inspection findings**

Interim inspections currently result in a relative judgement that declares a home to have improved, declined or sustained its effectiveness since the last inspection. This means readers need to refer to the previous Ofsted report to gain a clear understanding of the home's performance.

We propose that the interim inspection will result in a single judgement based on the findings of that inspection. This will replace the current methodology's relative judgement. The new judgement will state whether or not we have found 'serious or

widespread concerns’.

Any improvements the provider has made will be evaluated for effectiveness. If the home has made insufficient progress since the last inspection, this will be recorded in the report and considered when reaching the judgement.

If we do identify serious and widespread weakness, we will always consider the next steps we can take, including enforcement action to protect the safety and welfare of children.

We believe this change would better inform homes and commissioners about our findings and provide a clear basis for any subsequent enforcement action.

## **Proposal 2: revise the inspection activity for interim inspections**

Interim inspections will usually be carried out on site over one day. This is the same as current arrangements. These inspections will usually be unannounced, as is the case now.

In our new methodology, we propose to focus inspection activity on 3 areas:

- whether children are safe
- whether children are well cared for
- whether leaders and managers are effective.

Inspectors will spend time: talking to children about their experiences of living in the home; reviewing arrangements for keeping children safe (including the use of restraint and sanctions); and finding out whether children can confidently make complaints.

We will assess the effectiveness of leaders and managers by talking to them and their staff, and reviewing the effectiveness of the monitoring arrangements. We want to see whether they have complied with the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection. We also want to see the impact of any improvements arising from this activity.

This is a shift away from our current methodology, where interim inspections focus more on a range of inspection tasks to reach a judgement on progress since the last inspection, rather than providing a stand-alone judgement of how well the home is operating at present.

## **Proposal 3: replace ‘interim’ with a**

## **more meaningful name**

We believe the name 'interim inspection' has little meaning now, and so we propose to rename it.

The purpose of an interim inspection of a children's home is to provide assurance that there are no widespread or serious concerns, by ensuring that children are well cared for and safe, and that leaders and managers are effective.

We therefore recommend the name 'assurance inspection'.

## **The SCCIF for RHSDC**

We are required by regulation to inspect each RHSDC once every year, irrespective of how long or how many times it runs. We want to provide assurance that the RHSDC is meeting the regulatory requirements without detracting from the children's experience of their holiday.

We will therefore update the SCCIF for RHSDC to acknowledge that these schemes are 'one-off' events run by volunteers, rather than enduring services like children's homes.

## **Proposal 4: update the language and emphasis in the SCCIF for RHSDC**

We recognise that some of the language in the SCCIF for RHSDC is less relevant or applies differently to them, compared with other social care settings like children's homes. We propose to make some amendments to reflect this.

We propose to increase the emphasis on the child's experience, and less on their progress. We intend to include more references to the needs of disabled children and consider some phrasing to ensure that it accurately reflects what happens at a holiday scheme. We believe this change will enhance the experiences of children and be more proportionate for providers.

## **Proposal 5: use a combination of on- and off-site inspection activities**

Currently, inspectors spend up to 2 days on site during an inspection of an

RHSDC, which involves a scheme's registered manager and responsible individual spending much of their time with the inspector rather than working with the children. Inspectors currently only contact a small number of parents to gather their views.

We believe that the inspection methodology will be improved by using a combination of on- and off-site activity and remote evidence-gathering that is proportionate and focused.

We propose that discussions with the organisers of the schemes about the planning and organisation will happen by telephone. Inspectors will contact professionals and parents to gain their views about the organisation and running of the scheme during this planning stage. This means that inspectors will gather the same kind of evidence (including getting more views from parents) but without getting in the way of the running of the scheme.

This means that the time on site will be reduced to up to one day. It will focus on activities such as:

- carrying out observations and conversations with children and volunteers
- reviewing the site, including sleeping arrangements
- reviewing incidents
- reviewing arrangements for mealtimes and medication

There will remain scope for the inspector to increase their time on site should concerns arise.

## **Proposal 6: require RHSDC to provide a formal notification**

We propose that the schemes will be required to provide a formal notification of the date and location of the scheme at a given point each year to aid with our planning, for example 6 months before the scheme begins to operate.

## **Proposal 7: carry out an interview with the manager before the scheme starts**

We propose that inspectors will contact the responsible individual or manager approximately 10 days before the first day of the scheme to:

- arrange a manager's interview by telephone
- review the arrangements for the scheme, such as recruitment and planning

- agree the most suitable time to visit.

## Consultation process

We welcome your responses to this consultation. The consultation opens on 2 November 2021 and closes on 24 January 2022.

We will publish a report on the outcome of this consultation before 11 March 2022.

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