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Official Statistics

# Methodology and quality report: local authority and children's homes in England

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## Introduction

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

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

From April 2021, Ofsted resumed the routine inspection of children's homes, which had been suspended since 17 March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. In May 2021, we also restarted routine monitoring visits for LAs rated as inadequate, regular focused visits and standard inspections. This year's release contains details of these inspections and visits. For more information, see [Ofsted guidance and information relating to COVID-19](#).

## Methodology

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

The inspections and outcomes data relates to inspections of:

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

We carry out inspections of LA children's services under the inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. You can find more information about inspection frameworks in the ['Relevant inspection frameworks' section](#).

## Periods covered by the release

Inspections and outcomes data for children's homes can either be viewed:

- for a 5-month period from 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2021, covering provisional data
- as the latest inspection for each home as at 31 August 2021, covering final data

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

- for a 5-month period from 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2021, covering provisional data
- as the latest inspection for each LA as at 31 August 2021, covering final data

## More information

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

This publication contains some provisional data. This is because there may have been additional inspections carried out during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2021 that we had not yet published at the time of the data being extracted for the release. We will include any revisions to these 5 months of data for children's homes in the July 2022 statistical release.

This 5-monthly release includes some data that was not included in the July 2021 release because there were some inspections carried out between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 that had not yet had their reports published when the data was extracted for the July 2021 release.

For example, 8 of the LA visits included in the underlying data in this release took place in March 2021 but were published in May 2021. These were not included in the previous publication, so have been included within the data in this release.

Ofsted inspects the 152 LAs in England responsible for ensuring and overseeing the effective delivery of social care services for children. The number of LAs is 152 from April 2021, due to the single LA Northamptonshire splitting into 2 separate LAs, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire. This change took effect on 1 April 2021, and the 2 newly formed LAs have not yet received a graded inspection. Additionally, 2 other LAs have not yet received a graded inspection due to their creation and change of boundaries in April 2019. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole now exists as a single LA, and Dorset had a change of boundaries following the removal of Christchurch. As a result of these changes, the analysis of LA inspections in this release is based on the outcomes for 148 LAs.

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

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

## Relevance

Ofsted regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. We release official statistics to promote reform and improvement across government through

increasing transparency and citizen participation.

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

For more information on how we regulate and/or inspect, see:

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

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

## How the data is used

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some of the data about children's homes in England is unique to Ofsted, such as data about inspections and outcomes, and alternative sources are not available. This data is widely viewed as a valuable source of information about services available in England. It provides an in-depth overall picture of the quality of children's homes provision in England.

## Meeting user needs

In early 2019, Ofsted's Social Care Data and Analysis team reviewed the production of children's social care statistical releases and ran a [consultation](#) to seek users' views on our proposals for revisions to the frequency and content of social care inspection official statistics and management information. Based on the responses, we decided to make all the changes as proposed in the consultation.

## User feedback

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

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

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

We include the contact details for the Social Care Data and Analysis team in the releases and we encourage users to provide feedback about any unmet needs or improvements that can be made.

The previous user engagement that shaped this release included:

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

There is more information available about [Ofsted's engagement policy and confidentiality and access policy, as well as our statement of administrative sources](#). We also operate under more detailed internal engagement guidance.

## Coherence and comparability

Comparisons of inspections and outcomes across different inspection frameworks are not always possible due to the changes to the evaluation criteria and scope of inspection. You can find more information about inspection frameworks in the ['Relevant inspection frameworks' section](#). The release itself makes a clear distinction for framework changes, so that it is clear to users where inspections are not directly comparable.

Comparisons of inspections and outcomes across different timescales within a particular inspection cycle are not always possible due to the way providers are risk assessed and selected for inspection. We take a proportionate approach to inspection. For example, some providers are selected for inspection because they are approaching the deadline for reinspection and others as a result of their previous inspection outcomes. The revision of the release to present annual, rather than quarterly, statistics allows users to more easily compare inspections and outcomes across timescales for some provider types, such as children's homes which are all inspected annually.

Within the main findings, where we make statements about whether inspection outcomes have improved or declined, we base this analysis on comparable inspections only and use the most recent relevant inspection outcome.

We consider data both in a fixed period, 1 April to 31 August, and as at a fixed date, 31 August. Again, we make comparisons between years when appropriate. We also consider and compare data between provider types, regions, sectors (private, LA and voluntary) and, when appropriate, LAs.

Some children's homes are managed by organisations that run children's services independently of the LA, specifically as trusts or alternative delivery mechanisms. In our analysis, we treat these children's homes as LA homes but in the underlying data they are recorded as belonging to the voluntary sector.

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

- the [Care Inspectorate Wales \(CIW\)](#)
- the [Care Inspectorate in Scotland](#)
- the [Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority in Northern Ireland](#)

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

## Accuracy and reliability

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

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

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

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

An example of the system-wide data checks is the rigorous checking of one particular area of data, which has turned inaccurate and partially completed data into complete and very valuable data. Several years ago, sector data was input at source, at best haphazardly and often incorrectly. We have transformed that into accurate data, by working with the administrative teams on the definition of the various sectors and also on the guidelines for completing the data filed in our database. The Social Care Data and Analysis team also carried out a national data

cleanse of this data. This involved contacting every provider and getting them to confirm the sector they were part of. The data now enables Ofsted to report on the sectors both internally and to wider users. This is important because there is a growing public interest in sector data and how the ownership pattern of social care providers may or may not be changing over time, and also the level of service provided by the differing sectors.

The dataset is securely stored in Excel format and is accessible only to Ofsted colleagues working on the release. We do some initial aggregation of data using an SQL database, but we do the analysis in Excel and R.

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

## Strengths of the data

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

Robust QA of the data by Ofsted: We carry out detailed QA of all tables, underlying data and reports created from this data. We have developed an R-based tool to check for inconsistencies in the underlying data and to compare with other internal sources.

Comprehensive snapshot of the children's homes sector: due to the known quality of the data, it provides a comprehensive picture of children's homes in England over the last 5 years.

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

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

## Limitations of the data

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



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

Errors or corrections in recording: although these are again minimal, there are occasions when data is recorded incorrectly or needs to be amended. For example, a setting may be recorded as being private instead of voluntary provision, which can impact on comparability between years. These are usually identified during the QA stage and accounted for. This may mean that numbers from across years and time periods occasionally appear to not add up correctly.

## Timeliness and punctuality

We produce and publish statistics on an annual basis. We also publish an additional release covering 5 months, which relates only to inspections and outcomes for children's homes and LAs. Supplementary data, including management information, is also published to improve accessibility to and usefulness of data, where appropriate.

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

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

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

## Accessibility and clarity

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

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

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

## **Performance, cost and respondent burden**

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

## **Confidentiality, transparency and security**

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

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

## **Data processing**

Data processing involves aggregating numbers of inspections, listed by inspection type, provision type, region and inspection outcome. We do this processing using SQL, which is reviewed and revised regularly.

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

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

- data about inspections of LA children's services includes inspections that were carried out under the current framework, and therefore do not reflect an annual period; the period covered is detailed in the release

- data about inspections of all children’s homes includes inspections that were carried out during the period of 5 months from 1 April to 31 August

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

No data has been removed before analysis.

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

## Relevant inspection frameworks for social care providers in England

### Children’s homes:

[Ofsted inspections of children’s homes.](#)

This link now refers to the SCCIF, in use from April 2017.

### LA children’s services:

[Inspections of local authority children’s services \(ILACS\).](#)

This link now refers to the ILACS framework, in use from January 2018.

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