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Guidance

Social care common inspection framework (SCCIF): residential family centres for April 2022

Updated 11 March 2022

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This guidance applies from 1 April 2022. See [guidance on inspections carried out until 31 March 2022](#).

Introduction

The social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) applies to inspections of:

- children's homes
- secure children's homes
- independent fostering agencies
- boarding schools and residential special schools

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- voluntary adoption agencies
- adoption support agencies
- residential family centres
- residential holiday schemes for disabled children
- residential provision in further education colleges

The SCCIF means that:

- we apply the same judgement structure across the range of settings listed above
- the experiences and progress of children and other service users, wherever they live or receive help, are central to inspections
- there are key areas of evidence that we usually report on at each inspection

The SCCIF is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ framework. Where necessary, the SCCIF reflects and addresses the unique and distinct aspects of each type of setting. However, the evaluation criteria we use to make judgements and the accompanying guidance are, wherever possible, consistent across settings.

The inspection principles

[Ofsted’s corporate strategy](#) outlines how we will carry out inspection and regulation that are:

- intelligent
- responsible
- focused

Our approach is further underpinned by the following 3 principles that apply to all social care inspections.

To focus on the things that matter most to children’s lives

We have reached a general consensus with the main social care stakeholders that social care inspections should focus on the experiences and progress of children. We regularly ask children, and the adults who look after them, what matters most about children’s experiences and progress.

Using this to guide us, we focus the criteria for our judgements on the difference that providers are making to children’s lives. Adults can only support children well if they’re given the time, resources and information they need to do this, so we also take account of the quality of the support that the adults who care for children receive.

In residential family centres, we focus on the quality of assessment and children’s and families’ experience of the assessment process as well as their progress through the assessment.

To be consistent in our expectations of providers

It’s important that professionals and members of the public can compare services that do similar things. We make this possible by being consistent in what we expect from providers. We use the same judgement structure and the same evaluation

criteria, wherever possible, irrespective of where children live or receive help.

Our inspection methods and published guidance only differ when there is a good reason. This includes taking a similar approach to deciding on the frequency of inspections.

To prioritise our work where improvement is needed most

We are committed to inspecting in a way that focuses our resources where they are needed most. If leaders and managers have shown that they can consistently deliver services for children well, we may decide to return less often or do a more proportionate inspection.

However, we always take into account the risk to children of not inspecting as frequently. We use a broad range of information to tell us whether standards are slipping. We are always able to go back to good and outstanding providers more quickly if we have concerns.

The focus of inspections

The SCCIF has a consistent and clear focus on evaluating the impact of care and support on the experiences and progress of children and families, largely through case tracking and sampling. This means that:

- inspectors spend less time looking at policies and procedures and more time looking at the impact of services on the lives of families
- we give the minimum notice of inspection, so that we can see settings as they are on a day-to-day basis, and so that the time providers may spend preparing for inspection is reduced as much as possible; we will be reviewing whether to reduce the notice period for settings that still have relatively lengthy notice arrangements
- we have set out as clearly as possible the details of the information required by inspectors to assist their inspection; this will enable providers to produce their best evidence whenever we give notice of inspection

How inspectors make judgements under the SCCIF

Judgement structure

Our judgement structure stems from our first principle of inspection – to focus on the things that matter most to children’s lives – and places the progress and experiences of children and other people who use children’s services at the core of inspections.

All SCCIF inspections follow the 4-point scale (outstanding, good, requires improvement to be good and inadequate) to make judgements on the overall experiences and progress of children, taking into account:

- how well children are helped and protected

- the effectiveness of leaders and managers

Inspections of adoption support agencies, voluntary adoption agencies and residential family centres also look at, as appropriate, the experiences of adult service users.

The judgement about how well children are helped and protected is a limiting judgement. This means that, if inspectors judge this area to be inadequate, then the 'overall experiences and progress' judgement will always be inadequate.

The judgement of the effectiveness of leaders and managers is a graded judgement. If inspectors judge this area to be inadequate, this is likely to lead to a judgement of inadequate, and certainly no more than requires improvement to be good, for 'overall experiences and progress'.

Inspectors will make the limiting and graded judgements first so that they can take these into account for the 'overall progress and experiences' judgement.

How inspectors use the evaluation criteria

Inspectors will use the descriptions of what 'good' looks like as the benchmarks against which to grade and judge performance. The judgement, however, is not derived from a checklist. It is a professional evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the care and support provided on the experiences and progress of children. Failure to meet all of the criteria for good will not automatically lead to a judgement of requires improvement to be good.

Some criteria will have less relevance than others in some settings because of the nature of the setting and the needs of the children.

Even when all the criteria are relevant, there is always a degree of professional judgement in weighing and balancing evidence against the evaluation criteria.

The inspector judges a setting to be good if they conclude that the evidence sits most appropriately with this finding. We call this the 'best fit'.

The evaluation criteria for SCCIF inspections are broadly consistent across different types of setting but, where necessary, they have been adapted to reflect the varying and unique nature of each type of provision.

Required evidence

Inspectors look at several areas of required evidence for each judgement. Some areas are common to all SCCIF inspections, but others are specific to the specific type of provision. The areas of required evidence are set out in the bullet points at the beginning of the evaluation criteria for each judgement.

Evaluation criteria

Inspectors use the following criteria to make judgements. This includes the benchmarks of what good looks like.

The overall experiences and progress of children and parents

Areas of required evidence are:

- the quality of individualised support provided and the influence and impact of the centre on children's and parents' experience of the assessment process, and any progress they make
- the quality of relationships between staff, children and parents
- how well families' views are understood and taken into account, and how their rights and entitlements are met
- the quality of children's and parents' experiences on a day-to-day basis
- how well the centre supports transitions
- the quality of assessments of parental capacity to meet their children's needs and promote their welfare
- how well staff understand and use the centre's assessment framework and any model of attachment, and how this supports the assessment of parental capacity

Good

The experiences and progress of children and parents are likely to be judged good if there is evidence of the following:

Children and parents are enabled to build trusted and secure relationships with staff at the centre. Staff know the children and parents well, listen to them and promote their welfare.

Children and parents, including those who communicate non-verbally, are supported to take active involvement in day-to-day and complex decisions about their lives, as appropriate. They are sensitively helped to understand where it may not be possible to act on their wishes, and to understand where other action is taken that is in children's best interests.

Children and parents know how to complain. The centre's complaints policy is easy to understand and accessible. Families understand what has happened as a result of their complaint. Their complaints are treated seriously and are responded to clearly. Urgent action is taken, and improvements happen accordingly.

Children and parents are supported to attend education, including pre-school groups, or employment where appropriate.

Children and parents have access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities, including activities and groups in the local community, as appropriate. They are supported to engage in faith-based activities if they wish.

The centre challenges the local authority effectively when it has concerns about the future plans for children and parents. The centre challenges external professionals about any delays in the assessment process.

Children and parents are being helped to improve their health or manage lifelong conditions. Their health needs are identified (including their mental and sexual health needs, and any substance or alcohol misuse, as appropriate). They have access to local health services when they need them. Arrangements for managing medication are safe and effective and promote independence wherever possible. Managers and staff develop effective relationships with all health professionals to promote good health. Staff help parents to access appropriate healthcare for their children, including appointments for immunisations and developmental checks.

Specialist help is made available according to the individual needs of children and parents and in line with the statement of purpose. The help is available as soon as it is needed, at the intensity required and for as long as required. If services are not available or families are waiting for a long time for help, the centre challenges and escalates concerns with the placing authority or other partners.

Any specific type or model of assessment and care, specialist help or support delivered or commissioned by the centre is provided by staff who are trained, experienced, qualified and supervised. Parents (and where appropriate) children understand who is involved in carrying out the assessment. The assessment plans, care and support are reviewed regularly.

Families who are new to the centre are welcomed sensitively and with careful and considered planning. When children and parents leave the centre, staff promote positive and timely endings. The centre works with placing authorities when endings are unplanned, so that the welfare and well-being of children remain paramount. The needs of other families at the centre are taken into account.

Parents and, where appropriate, children are supported to develop skills and strategies to manage their own conflicts and difficult feelings through developing positive relationships with staff. There are clear, consistent and appropriate boundaries for children and parents.

Children and parents are treated with dignity and respect. They experience assessment and help that are sensitive and responsive to their identity and family history, including age, disability, faith or belief, sex, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation.

Staff always place the well-being of individual children at the centre of their practice. The centre works with parents to promote and protect children's well-being. Their day-to-day needs are met, such as routine, privacy, personal space, nutritious meals and enjoyable mealtimes.

Children and parents have appropriate, carefully assessed, supported contact (direct or indirect) with their family, friends and other people who are important to them. There are no unnecessary restrictions in place.

Staff support good relations between families living at the centre.

Parents and (where appropriate) children are clear about what parenting skills are being assessed and how the assessment process works. They are helped to understand any model of attachment used by the centre and how this will impact on their assessment. They feel fully engaged in the assessment process and feel able to challenge the views of the assessors. They also receive regular feedback from staff on the progress of their assessment.

Assessments focus on safeguarding children and identifying their needs, and take into account parents' views. Assessments are individualised and realistic about what parents can achieve and the support required if children are to continue safely living with their parents. Parents understand the measures staff use to assess their progress and their capacity to make progress. The assessment is carried out in line with statutory guidance.

Progress through the assessment is timely, with any delays accounted for.

Final assessment reports are evaluative and analytical, succinctly describing parents' strengths and areas for development, their capacity for change and the extent to which they understand the impact of their actions on their children. Clear recommendations are made to inform decision-making about children's futures. Prompt action is taken to complete the assessment if this is in the child's best interests. Reports are clear about how any training,

therapy or education programme that the centre provides has improved parenting capacity.

Requires improvement to be good

The experiences and progress of children and parents are likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if there is evidence of the following:

The centre is not yet delivering good assessments of parenting capacity and/or is not delivering good care and help. The weaknesses identified need to be addressed to fully support children's and parents' progress through the assessment process and to mitigate risk in the medium and long term. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that mean children's welfare is not safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate

The experiences and progress of children and parents are likely to be judged inadequate if there is evidence of the following:

There are serious or widespread failures that mean children are not protected, or that result in children's welfare not being promoted or safeguarded, or that progress through the assessment process has been avoidably delayed or assessment is weak.

Outstanding

The experiences and progress of children and parents are likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a good judgement, there is evidence of the following:

Professional practice, including the quality of assessments and assessment reports, consistently exceeds the standard of good. There are examples of excellent practice that are worthy of wider dissemination.

How well children and parents are helped and protected

Areas of required evidence are:

- how well the centre promotes and protects children's welfare throughout the assessment process
- how well risks are identified, understood and managed and whether the support provided helps parents to understand and minimise risk so that they can help their children to become increasingly safe
- the provider's actions in response to children who may go missing or may be at risk of harm, including from exploitation, neglect, abuse, self-harm, bullying and radicalisation, and to children's parents who may go missing from the centre

- how well staff manage situations and behaviour and whether clear and consistent boundaries contribute to a feeling of well-being and security for children and parents
- whether safeguarding arrangements to protect children and parents meet all statutory and other government requirements

Good

The help and protection offered to children and parents are likely to be judged good if there is evidence of the following:

Children feel protected and are protected from harm, including neglect, abuse, exploitation, accidents, bullying and radicalisation. There is a strong and proactive response from all those working with children and parents that reduces harm or risk of harm to them, including from self-harm. That response includes regular and effective contact and planning with the child's and family's allocated social workers and with the wider family, if this is appropriate and in accordance with plans for their future.

Families report that staff listen to them, take their concerns seriously and respond appropriately.

Any risks associated with children or their parents offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, self-harming, going missing, being affiliated with gangs or being exploited are known and understood by staff. Individual up-to-date risk assessments address effectively any known vulnerabilities for each child and parent and set out what action should be taken. There are plans and help in place that are reducing harm or the risk of harm and there is evidence that these risks are being minimised. When staff believe that risks posed by or to any parent or child cannot be managed safely within the centre, they take prompt action to address this.

Children and parents who go missing experience well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them. Risks are well understood and minimised. There is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of further harm. The centre is aware of and implements, as appropriate, the requirements of the statutory guidance for children who are missing. The centre responds effectively to children and parents who are missing.

Parents are helped to keep themselves and their children safe from bullying, homophobic behaviour, racism, sexism, radicalisation and other forms of discrimination. Any discriminatory behaviours are challenged. Help and support are given to families about how to treat others with respect.

Parents receive help and support to manage their own and their children's behaviours and feelings safely. Staff respond with clear boundaries about what is safe and acceptable and seek to understand the triggers for behaviour.

Positive behaviour is promoted consistently. Staff use effective de-escalation techniques and creative alternative strategies that are specific to the needs of each child or parent and designed in consultation with them where possible.

Conflict management is effective and includes the appropriate use of restorative practices that improve relationships, increase parents' sense of personal responsibility and reduce the need for formal police intervention.

Proactive and effective working relationships with the police, health, children's social care and other professionals help to support and protect children and parents. Staff work with the police to protect families at the centre from any unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice system.

Staff understand the risks that using the internet may pose for children and parents, such as bullying, grooming or abuse. They have well-developed strategies in place to keep children and parents safe, and to support parents to keep themselves and their children safe.

Careful recruitment and regular monitoring of staff and volunteers prevent unsuitable people from being recruited and having the opportunity to harm children and parents, or to place them at risk. The relevant authorities are informed of any concerns about inappropriate adults.

Staff working within the centre know and follow procedures for responding to concerns about the safety of a child or parent. Any child or adult protection concerns are immediately shared with the placing or host local authority as required, and a record of that referral is retained.

There is evidence that staff follow up the outcome of the referral quickly and that appropriate action has been taken to protect the child or parent from further harm. If the centre is not satisfied with the response from either the local authority where the centre is situated or the placing authority, it escalates its concerns appropriately, including by writing to the director of children's services (DCS) in the local authority placing the family.

Investigations into allegations or suspicion of harm are shared with the appropriate agencies and are handled fairly, quickly and in accordance with statutory guidance. Children and, where relevant, parents are supported and protected. Support is given both to the person making the allegation and the person who is the subject of the allegation.

The centre has effective links with local authorities, designated officers and other safeguarding agencies. There is good communication about safeguarding issues, such as allegations against staff. The centre has good relationships with relevant local voluntary sector organisations that may be able to offer specialist support to children and parents in keeping themselves safe.

The physical environment for children and parents is safe and secure and protects them from harm or the risk of harm. Risk assessments for the physical environment are regularly reviewed and updated and comply with statutory requirements.

If surveillance and electronic monitoring are used, their use is appropriate and in line with regulations and the centre's published policy. Any use is recorded and regularly reviewed with families and the placing authority.

Requires improvement to be good

The help and protection offered to children and parents are likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if there is evidence of the following:

Children are not yet receiving good help and protection, but there are no serious failures that leave them either harmed or at risk of harm.

Inadequate

The help and protection offered to children and parents are likely to be judged inadequate if there is evidence of the following:

There are serious or widespread failures that leave children being harmed, at risk of harm or with their welfare not being safeguarded.

Outstanding

The help and protection offered to children and parents are likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a good judgement, there is evidence of the following:

Professional practice results in sustained improvement to the safety and welfare of children. Highly effective planning, assessment and support manages and minimises risks inside and outside the centre.

Proactive and creative safeguarding practice means that all children and parents, including the most vulnerable, have a strong sense of safety and well-being. Parents are involved in creating ways to de-escalate situations and finding creative alternative strategies that are effective.

Research-informed practice, some of which may be innovative, continues to develop from a strong and confident base, making an exceptional difference to the experiences and safety of children and parents.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Areas of required evidence are:

- whether leaders and managers show an ambitious vision, have realistic expectations for what parents can achieve and ensure high standards of assessment, support and safety
- the extent to which leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the progress that families are making in respect of the assessment plan for them
- whether leaders and managers provide the right supportive environment for staff and volunteers through effective supervision and appraisal and high-quality induction and training programmes that are tailored to the specific needs of the children and parents
- how well leaders and managers know and understand the centre's strengths and weaknesses, prevent shortfalls, identify weaknesses and take decisive and effective action to rectify them
- whether the centre is achieving its stated aims and objectives
- the quality of professional relationships to ensure the best possible all-round assessment and support to children and parents in all areas of their development
- whether leaders and managers actively challenge when the responses from other services are not effective
- the extent to which leaders and managers actively promote tolerance, equality and diversity

Good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers is likely to be judged good if there is evidence of the following:

The centre is managed effectively and efficiently by a permanent, suitably experienced and qualified registered manager. A registered social worker carries out the final assessment report. Urgent action is taken to address any vacancy of the registered manager post.

The centre is properly staffed and resourced to meet the needs of the families at the centre. The staff team is suitably vetted and able to deliver high-quality services. Arrangements for recruitment and appraisals are robust.

Leaders and managers regularly monitor the quality of assessment, care and help provided. They use learning from practice and feedback to improve assessments and the experiences of and support for children and parents. This includes, for example, direct testimony from children, parents, other professionals and other stakeholders, including the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and the courts.

Leaders and managers learn from ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of assessment practice, including a review of the effectiveness of assessment outcome recommendations, complaints, staff feedback, placement successes and breakdowns, and any serious events. They identify strengths and areas for improvement and implement clear development plans that continually improve the experiences and care of children and parents. Any breaches of the national minimum standards (NMS) do not directly impact on the safety or welfare of children.

Action is taken to address all issues of concern, including concerns or complaints from children, parents, local residents and placing authorities. Placing and host authorities are engaged as necessary. Effective action has been taken to address all requirements and recommendations from previous inspections.

Leaders and managers ensure that assessment plans, reports and care plans for individual children and parents comprehensively address their needs, are of high quality and are error-free.

Leaders and staff work proactively and positively with other agencies and professionals. They seek to build effective working relationships to secure the best outcomes for children and parents.

If families are not settling into the centre, leaders and managers take steps to ensure that the assessment plan is reviewed with the placing authority and the family (when this is appropriate) to consider the best steps to take next. They challenge effectively and take action when they are concerned that placing authorities are not making decisions that are in children's best interests, when the statutory requirements for looked-after children are not met, or when they cannot keep children safe.

Leaders and managers understand the assessment and care plans for children and parents, and drive the achievement of important assessment milestones and goals. Leaders and managers monitor the capacity for change in parents. They can demonstrate the positive impact that living at the centre has had on individual children's life chances and stability of relationships. They take action to promptly challenge delays and escalate any concerns regarding the progress of the assessment, to promote children's best opportunity to maintain or develop secure attachments.

Managers and staff, including volunteers, receive regular and effective supervision that is focused on children and parents' experiences, needs, assessments and feedback. Supervision is recorded effectively.

Staff and leaders receive effective support and challenge, including through team and management meetings, to ensure that the professional development of staff and leaders results in the right environment for good practice to thrive. The emotional impact on staff of the work is recognised and managed well by leaders and managers.

Training, development and induction activities are effective. They are focused on ensuring that staff can carry out effective assessments and can meet the specific needs of families at the centre. Activities are evaluated to ensure that they lead to effective practice. Leaders, managers and staff are up to date with current practice in their specialist area. The centre's attachment and/or assessment models are well-understood and consistently practised.

Staff work collaboratively to provide consistency and stability. There are clear responsibilities and accountabilities and staff have a sense of shared ownership about its practice. Staff report that they are well led and managed and there is other evidence to support this.

Leaders and managers make child-centred decisions about families coming to live at the centre. They prioritise the safety and stability of the group environment and new admissions take account of the likely impact of new families joining the group.

The statement of purpose, which is kept under review, clearly sets out the ethos and objectives of the centre.

Leaders and managers ensure that the physical environment is maintained to a high standard meets the needs of the families in relation to space and privacy to live as a family. Any damage or wear and tear is quickly and

regularly repaired.

The registered provider is financially viable and can deliver high-quality assessments, help and support for children and parents.

Case records reflect children's and parent's everyday lives and the work that is carried out with them. The records reflect children's and parent's experiences and clearly relate to the assessments. The style and clarity of records increases the understanding that children and parents have about their histories, background, experiences and their progress through their assessment. The records are available to parents and, where appropriate, children. They can see them, challenge them or contribute to them as they wish, with appropriate support.

The registered person ensures that notifications of all significant events that relate to the welfare and protection of children placed at the centre are made to the appropriate authorities. The registered person takes the necessary action following the incident to ensure that the child's needs are met and that they are safe and protected.

The culture of the centre is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all children and parents. The ethos and objectives of the centre are demonstrated in practice.

Leaders and managers regularly review and act on any known risks to children, taking advice and guidance from local partners and agencies.

Requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers is likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if there is evidence of the following:

The characteristics of good leadership and management are not in place. Not all of the NMS are met. Where there are weaknesses in practice or assessment, leaders and managers have identified the issues. They have plans in place to address them or they are less serious and there is capacity to take the necessary action. Any failure to meet the regulations (see ['Legal context'](#)) does not affect the safety or welfare of children.

Inadequate

The effectiveness of leaders and managers will be judged inadequate if there is

evidence of the following:

The experiences, progress of the assessment or protection of children and their parents are inadequate, and leaders and managers do not know the strengths and weaknesses of the centre. They have been ineffective in prioritising, challenging and making improvements.

Any failure to meet the regulations places children at risk of harm.

The provider has not taken effective and timely steps to appoint an appropriate, permanent manager within a reasonable timeframe and/or the appointed manager has not registered as soon as possible.

The assessment report is completed by an individual who is not a registered social worker.

Outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a good judgement, there is evidence of the following:

Leaders and managers are inspirational, confident, ambitious for children and parents, and influential in changing the lives of those in their care.

The quality of assessment is exceptional. There is clear evidence that leaders and managers routinely gather information on outcomes for families after they have left the centre. They evaluate whether their assessment reports contribute to effective decisions about children's futures.

Leaders and managers create a culture of aspiration and positivity. They have high expectations of their staff to deliver qualitative and evidence-based assessments about the lives of the children and parents, and parental capacity to change and improve.

Leaders and managers lead by example, innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest quality assessment, help and support for children and parents.

Leaders and managers know their strengths and weaknesses well and can provide evidence of improvement over a sustained period.

Leaders and managers maintain relationships between the centre and partner agencies that ensure the best possible care, assessment, experiences and futures for children and parents.

External professionals comment positively on the quality of the assessments, which are completed in a timely way.

There are no breaches of the NMS.

Legal context

Under the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), Ofsted carries out its work in ways that encourage the services it inspects and regulates to:

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

Section 5(1A) of the [Care Standards Act 2000](#) provides that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is the registration authority for residential family centres and other establishments and agencies to which Part 2 of that Act applies.

The Care Standards Act 2000 sets out Ofsted's powers to register and inspect residential family centres and, where necessary, enforce compliance with the Act and the relevant regulations. Section 4(2) of the Act defines a residential family centre.

When inspecting residential family centres, Ofsted considers the knowledge and understanding gained from previous inspections and the:

- [Care Standards Act 2000](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002](#) as amended
- [Residential Family Centres: National Minimum Standards \(2013\)](#)

How inspectors use the national minimum standards

Residential family centres must follow the regulations. If they do not, inspectors

identify clearly what providers must do by setting requirements or compliance or enforcement action.

The Department for Education (DfE) publishes [NMS](#). If providers do not meet these, it may indicate a failure to meet the regulations.

Inspectors consider:

- the impact on children and parents
- how it should influence the judgements and outcome of the inspection, including any enforcement action

A failure to meet a regulation does not automatically lead to a judgement of requires improvement to be good.

Requirements may still be made when providers are judged to be good.

We use recommendations to indicate where practice can improve. These are always related to the relevant NMS and the regulations.

Notice of inspection

Inspections of residential family centres are unannounced.

We ask centres to provide access to premises, records and space to work. Inspectors may ask for help to navigate electronic records systems.

Centres do not need to provide files in hard copy unless these are already used, although the inspector may ask for specific reports or documents to be printed.

Request for information at an inspection

At the start of an inspection, the inspector gives the manager in charge a copy of [Annex A](#) to complete and agrees with them when this will be ready.

This information is requested under [section 31 of the Care Standards Act 2000](#). The information supports the inspection process and informs the inspection findings. It may generate supplementary lines of enquiry.

Providers can download [Annex A](#) and keep it updated ready for their full inspection. They can send this to the inspector electronically during the inspection. Some of the information is stored by Ofsted as inspection evidence. No personal data is stored.

The inspector will also provide a letter, which is for the provider/manager to email/send to all staff who work at the centre. It provides contact details of the inspector(s) should staff wish to contact them during the inspection.

Scheduling and the inspection team

Frequency of inspection

We inspect residential family centres at least once in every 3-year inspection cycle

as set out in ([Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills \(Fees and Frequency of Inspections\) \(Children's Homes etc.\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2007 \(SI 2015/551\)](#)).

We operate a rolling 3-year programme of inspection for each residential family centre. This means that, rather than a static 3-year cycle where all centres are inspected within each 3-year window, each centre will usually be inspected in the 3-year period following its individual inspection. The 3-year period begins on the 1 April in the year following its individual inspection. For example, for centres inspected between April 2021 and March 2022, a new 3-year cycle begins on 1 April 2022.

We usually reinspect centres that are inadequate within 6 to 12 months of their previous inspection. We usually return to inspect centres that require improvement within 12 to 18 months.

Scheduling

The scheduling of inspections takes account of:

- previous inspection findings
- complaints and concerns about the service
- questionnaire responses from parents, social workers and other stakeholders notifications
- the contents of monitoring reports given to Ofsted by residential family centres under regulations 23, 25 and 26 of the [Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002](#) as amended

Generally, we inspect new residential family centres within 12 months from registration as it is important that we can make judgements about the quality of assessment and care provided. Following this inspection, the centre is next inspected according to the rolling 3-year inspection programme (see '[Frequency of inspection](#)' section).

Where possible, the same inspectors will not inspect a residential family centre for more than 3 consecutive inspections. However, in certain instances, for example, if Ofsted is taking enforcement action, it may be important for continuity purposes to retain the same inspectors until the enforcement action has finished.

Length of inspection

For a full inspection of a residential family centre, inspectors may spend a maximum of 2½ days on site.

The inspector and the regulatory inspection manager (RIM) should decide how best to allocate resources for inspections. If necessary, the RIM should agree to either the inspector spending additional days on site or additional inspectors being deployed on the inspection.

Inspectors should determine whether:

- the amount of time on site should be reduced, such as when only a very small number of assessments have been carried out since the previous inspection
- additional resources, such as more inspectors or more time, or both, should be deployed, for example at larger centres, or when there are specific issues, such as a serious incident, to consider

Deferrals

We will grant deferrals in line with our [deferral policy](#).

Timeframe

Timeframe for an inspection from planning to publication of the report.

Day Inspection activity

1	Preparation (and if required, start of inspection on site)
2	Site visit
3	Site visit
4	Report writing
5 to 8	Inspection evidence and report submitted for quality assurance
21	Draft report sent to the registered provider for any comments within a maximum of 18 working days from the end of inspection
26	Provider returns the report within 5 working days with any comments
33	Final report sent to the registered provider within 30 working days of the end of the inspection
38	Provider may submit a formal complaint within 5 working days of the issue of the final report
41	The final report is published on the Ofsted reports website within a maximum of 38 working days from the end of inspection

Preparing for an inspection

Analysis and planning

Inspectors are allocated one day to prepare for a full inspection. They should use this time to review the information held by Ofsted and to make sure fieldwork is focused and effective in collecting first-hand evidence.

Inspectors will look at the information that Ofsted already holds about the agency, including:

- previous inspection reports
- completed questionnaires from parents, staff, social workers and commissioners and partner agencies
- the residential family centre's statement of purpose
- any concerns and complaints received
- notifications of significant events

- reports of monthly visits received under regulation 25
- quality assurance reports received under regulation 23
- any changes to registration, including change of manager or the responsible individual
- any enforcement activity that has happened since the last inspection

Some of this information is drawn together in the provider information portal.

The inspector should always familiarise themselves with relevant background and context information, such as the most recent inspection of the local authority where the centre is situated.

If we have received information that indicates potential non-compliance with regulatory requirements, we may use the information as a line of enquiry during the inspection. The inspector usually outlines the concern to the registered person(s) or person in charge of the centre at the beginning of the inspection. There may be circumstances where it is not appropriate to share all the information about a concern; for example, where the allegation is about the registered person or person in charge themselves, or where sharing the information could compromise an investigation being carried out by another agency, such as the police.

The inspector analyses the evidence and information and records their planning notes on the inspection database.

The plan for the inspection should identify:

- lines of enquiry
- any areas of apparent weakness or significant strength
- areas where further evidence needs to be gathered

The focus of the inspection may change during its course as further evidence emerges.

Questionnaires

Each year, Ofsted uses [online questionnaires](#) to gather a range of views about different types of setting. Where relevant, this includes the views of:

- children
- parents and carers
- staff
- foster carers
- adopters
- adult service users
- other interested parties such as placing social workers and independent reviewing officers

We send links to the questionnaires annually to each provider by email and ask them to distribute those links on our behalf. The responses are submitted directly to Ofsted.

We share responses with the inspector for the service or setting and use them to inform the planning and scheduling of inspections.

If there are no responses for a service or setting, this also forms a line of enquiry for the inspection.

Notifications made under regulation 26 and reports made under regulations 23 and 25

Inspectors must regularly review notifications made under [regulation 26](#), and reports under [regulation 23 and 25 reports](#). Inspectors must focus on both their content and quality as part of their evaluation of the centre's monitoring of its impact on children and parents.

Information from any of these sources may result in:

- further activity, such as speaking to the registered manager or provider or other stakeholders
- inspections being rescheduled based on concerns within reports or notifications, or based on a failure to submit reports or notifications
- lines of enquiry for the next inspection of the residential family centre, including: management of issues and concerns; quality and effectiveness of leadership; oversight of the care and support of children and parents; and timeliness of notifications to Ofsted and other parties

Any emerging lines of enquiry must be recorded in the inspection database and inform pre-inspection planning.

Notifications under regulation 26

Registered persons (providers and managers) must [notify Ofsted without delay about specific events and incidents](#) as set out in regulations.

Providers should always seek advice from their link inspector about individual cases if they are uncertain how to proceed.

If the inspector identifies issues that give them cause for concern about the welfare of children, they should ask for evidence that shows what has been done to help and protect the child.

If notifications are incomplete, the inspector should always ask the provider for more information.

Whenever there are concerns about the welfare of a child or parent, the inspector must contact the centre's manager. Ofsted must be fully aware of what is being done by the placing authority and other organisations, such as the host authority and police, to safeguard the child or parent.

Managers and staff should take into account the appropriate parts of the statutory guidance outlined in [Working together to safeguard children](#).

If the inspector has any concern about the practice of either the placing or host local authority, this is managed in line with [Ofsted's policy on safeguarding](#).

The DCS must be notified immediately of the concerns so they can review the situation. This information also informs any forthcoming local authority inspection.

Inspectors monitor closely whether Ofsted is informed of the outcome of any child protection enquiry, in line with regulations and statutory guidance. If this has not been received promptly, the inspector should contact the residential family centre. Inspectors must follow up any failure to notify Ofsted of the outcome.

Reports under regulations 23 and 25

Regulation 25 of the [Residential Family Centre Regulations 2002](#) requires that the provider arranges for a person to visit the residential family centre at least once a month and this may be unannounced. The regulation also requires the visitor to complete a report and provide a copy to HMCI. We require the person to send the

report to Ofsted before the end of each month that follows the month of the visit. This requirement still applies when there are no children and parents accommodated at the centre.

Regulation 23 of the [Residential Family Centre Regulations 2002](#) requires the registered person to produce a report at appropriate intervals, reviewing the quality of care provided by the centre.

Providers can submit reports by email to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. Providers must include Ofsted's unique reference number (URN) and the date on which the visit occurred on the report.

The on-site inspection

The start of the inspection

At the start of all inspections, the inspector confirms their identity by producing their Ofsted inspector identification. They do not need to carry paper copies of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

The inspector always meets with the manager or person in charge at the beginning of the inspection to:

- outline the plan for the inspection and confirm whether it is a full inspection or a monitoring visit
- arrange to interview the registered manager during the inspection; if the registered manager is unavailable to attend the inspection (and the responsible individual is also unavailable), the responsible individual should identify a suitable representative
- outline any lines of enquiry for the inspection, including those generated through reading the statement of purpose
- provide the person in charge with the opportunity to share current information or personal issues relating to any children or parents living at the centre, that the inspector needs to be aware of during the inspection
- ensure that Ofsted holds the correct details on the inspection database (as required by regulations), including email addresses and phone numbers for the manager, registered provider and/or responsible individual, any other partners, directors or trustees (see [Annex A](#))
- ensure that Ofsted holds records of the latest qualification of the registered manager or progress made on any qualifications being undertaken
- arrange the approximate time that verbal feedback will be given and who is to receive this; feedback is normally given to the registered manager or senior member of staff present and the representative of the registered provider; additional senior staff linked to the centre may also attend at the discretion of the inspector if agreed in advance

If the inspection has been prompted by our receiving information about a concern or allegation, the inspector should explain to the registered manager or person in charge of the centre the nature of that information. This is so that the manager is fully aware of the concerns. This also provides an opportunity for the manager to provide additional information and for the inspector to be as open with them about the information as possible. If the information is from a whistle-blower or from someone who wishes to remain anonymous, then the inspector must take the utmost care to ensure that the person's identity is not revealed.

Case tracking and sampling

Evaluating the experiences and progress of children and parents is a core inspection activity. Progress relates to the way the family is progressing through the assessment process. This is largely based on evidence from case tracking and sampling.

For tracked cases, inspectors take an in-depth look at the quality of the help and protection that individual children and parents have experienced. For sampled cases, inspectors look at elements of practice within individual cases, usually to follow lines of enquiry.

We take into account individuals' starting points and circumstances during inspections.

Children and parents' overall experiences and progress are, in part, a result of how well they are helped and protected and the effectiveness of leaders and managers. Inspectors consider the 'help and protection' and 'leadership and management' judgements first so that they can take these into account when reaching the 'overall experiences and progress' judgement.

Inspectors track the experiences and progress of at least 2 cases in small centres. In larger centres, they look at a greater sample of cases.

Inspectors also sample elements of other cases to follow specific lines of enquiry.

The size of the centre and the nature of any lines of enquiry determine how many cases are sampled.

Tracked and sampled cases should be selected by the inspector from the case list provided and usually include, where relevant:

- any family that has recently arrived at the centre
- any family whose home is a long way from the centre
- any family that is nearing completion of their assessment
- the last court report for a family that has been assessed by the centre

Inspectors also assess, where relevant, the management of a recent incident. This is so that they can understand how the staff team responds to complex and difficult circumstances, and whether the actions and responses are focused on promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and parents.

Case files are only one aspect of children and parents' journeys. Inspectors increase their understanding of children and parents' experiences through evidence from other sources, such as by observing practice and discussions with individuals involved in the case. When tracking the case of a looked-after child, inspectors should consult the independent reviewing officer and the placing social worker.

Inspectors examine, discuss and evaluate cases in line with the evaluation criteria. Inspectors look for evidence that the centre has had a positive impact on the experiences and progress of children and parents and that managers and staff know they are making a difference to children and parents' lives.

The detail of activities carried out and discussions held varies depending on the lines of enquiry for each individual inspection.

Inspectors must record the initials of children, professionals or carers who have been tracked, sampled and/or interviewed as part of an inspection within the evidence base.

Listening and talking to children and parents

The views of children and parents are central to the inspection and provide important evidence of their experiences and progress.

Inspectors assess how well the centre consults with children and parents. Children's and parents' views gathered by the service are taken into account as part of the inspection evidence.

Inspectors always try to meet with children and parents during the inspection. In exceptional circumstances, inspectors may make alternative arrangements to speak to children and parents, such as telephone calls at a pre-arranged time. Sometimes, inspectors will spend time observing activities and situations where children and parents are present, rather than engaging in direct communication with them. This is to limit any stress caused to children and their parents. In doing this, the inspectors can observe how the children and parents interact with staff and respond to their environment. These approaches will be discussed throughout the inspection as necessary.

Inspectors should involve children and parents in inspection activity whenever they can. Opportunities to hear their views may include:

- asking families to show inspectors around their accommodation
- holding structured meetings (as a general guideline, a meeting should not include more than 5 people)
- having individual conversations
- spending time with families in their accommodation

Communication methods

Inspectors should bear in mind the limits of verbal consultation with some children, particularly those who are disabled or have complex health care needs, and they should take this into account in their evaluation. In these cases, they would expect to see the centre using appropriate alternative means of gathering children's views or lived experiences and providing them with feedback about the impact of their consultation.

Inspectors must take into account the specific communication needs of individual children and parents. The inspectors may request the help of staff or an independent person who knows and understands a preferred means of communication, particularly if this is unique to the child or parent.

Inspectors can request the services of an interpreter to join the inspection. This is helpful when the children or parents are fluent in British Sign Language. Inspectors request this service via the inspection support team and give 2 weeks' notice where possible.

Parents, including those who have limited or no verbal communication, may wish to share their views in a letter to the inspector.

Practice when gathering the views of children

Inspectors demonstrate safe and sensitive practice by:

- telling staff when and where conversations with children and parents are taking place and who is involved
- being sensitive to the fact that some families may not want to be involved in the inspection
- explaining to families that they will not include comments that will identify them in the inspection report or in feedback to staff working in the home without their permission

- ensuring that staff are aware of any arranged meetings with family members and that children and parents may leave the meeting at any time
- where appropriate, explaining to families that information suggesting they or another child or parent are at risk of harm will be passed to an appropriate person able to take necessary action about that concern

Inspectors respect the privacy and confidentiality of personal information at all times. They always involve staff in any decisions about children's involvement in the inspection.

Observing activities

Inspectors can use the centre's scheduled activities as opportunities for observing and following lines of enquiry. These activities could include:

- play and daily care routines for parents and children
- staff handover between shifts
- meetings with families
- staff meetings or briefings
- family group activity sessions

Inspectors always seek to strike a balance between the time taken to observe an activity and the significance of the likely evidence to be gained.

Gathering views of other professionals

Inspectors consult with professionals to inform the inspection findings. This is usually through a telephone call during the inspection and may not always take place on site. These professionals may include:

- placing representatives of the placing family court(s)
- social workers
- representatives from Cafcass
- the police
- commissioners from the local authority
- the local authority designated officer
- relevant health and education professionals
- the person who visits the centre on behalf of the provider under regulation 25 of the [Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002](#)

Inspectors ask for the relevant contact details through [Annex A](#).

Inspectors should always take account of privacy and confidentiality when talking to stakeholders on the telephone during the inspection.

Discussions with managers and staff

Individual interviews are held with the registered manager/person in charge and a number of other staff. The number of staff interviewed depends on the size of the centre but will include a sample of permanent staff and any agency staff working in the centre at the time of inspection.

If the registered manager is not available, the inspector should ask to interview the responsible individual.

The inspector always asks to interview the responsible individual where:

- there is no registered manager in post
- there are concerns about the quality of assessment, care and support, the effectiveness of monitoring arrangements, or the quality of leadership and management of the centre
- evidence indicates that the centre is failing to protect children and parents
- there are concerns about staffing, the premises or resources to manage the provision

The interview with the manager usually covers:

- issues that have arisen from pre-inspection information or early lines of enquiry
- discussions about the ethos of the residential family centre as described in the statement of purpose and any specific lines of enquiry arising
- discussions about any attachment and/or assessment model that the centre uses, and how this is integrated into the family assessment
- discussions about how the assessments work in practice, including how the centre works with children and parents to meet their needs and assess parenting capacity
- the centre's evidence of its impact on the experiences of families living there and that have recently left
- questions about the theoretical and professional understanding and approach to working with vulnerable children and parents and assessing parents' capacity to parent and change
- discussions about how the manager ensures that assessments are carried out appropriately for each family
- the manager's knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre and plans for future development and how they effectively lead the team and promote a culture of continuous improvement
- follow-up progress in response to previous requirements and recommendations the quality and effectiveness of practice-related supervision the manager receives and gives to staff
- challenge and enquiry about the relationship of the centre with other professionals and services
- any other evidence they may wish to highlight to the inspector

During the inspection, the inspector shares emerging findings about the centre's strengths and weaknesses with a registered person (usually the registered manager) so that they fully understand the issues being identified.

The inspector usually meets with the registered provider and manager at the end of day 1 to share emerging findings. The inspector will normally set out what they intend to consider later in the inspection. The manager then has the opportunity to prepare and direct inspectors to any specific information or evidence required.

Shortfalls that could have an immediate impact on the safety of staff, children or parents are brought to the attention of the manager or the senior member of staff on duty as soon as the inspector has identified the problem.

Inspectors want to establish that the centre's monitoring systems are robust enough to identify strengths and weaknesses in practice.

Inspectors do not spend time routinely counting medication or petty cash, carrying out vehicle checks or checking water temperatures or contents of fridges, freezers and food storage areas unless there is a specific line of enquiry.

Inspectors should be prepared to alter interview arrangements if staff have to attend to the needs of families.

Assessing financial viability

The [Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002](#) state that 'the registered provider shall carry on the residential family centre in such manner as is likely to ensure that it will be financially viable for the purpose of achieving the aims and objectives set out in the statement of purpose'.

Inspectors are only expected to carry out a lay person's assessment of the financial information. If, during a routine inspection, the inspector has concerns about the financial viability of a provider, for example due to the poor repair of premises or the standard of day-to-day care or services, they should follow [registration guidance](#).

Inspectors should explain to providers why they are requesting financial information during an inspection or at any other time.

The financial information Ofsted can request ranges from professionally produced business plans to a collection of accounts (including profit and loss accounts), records and financial forecasts.

Examining records, policies and procedures

Inspectors do not routinely examine all policies and procedures. Inspectors examine documents when they may inform a line of enquiry for that specific inspection.

However, inspectors do usually look at:

- referral information
- pre-admission assessments
- court instructions
- requirements from the placing authority
- core assessment and placement plan reports
- completed assessment reports

Inspectors focus on the impact of documents such as risk assessments and how they work in practice, rather than the format. What matters is that they are fit for purpose and provide enough information to staff so they can assess, care and support children and parents. The inspector may ask to see personnel records if they are included in the lines of enquiry. Centres can maintain electronic records if:

- the records meet the requirements of regulation
- the records are appropriately accessible to children and parents if they want to access theirs
- staff have access to the information they require to assess, care and support families

If recruitment records are not maintained at the centre, inspectors look at the centre's list of electronic records that summarises the vetting and recruitment checks for staff. These records could be maintained as checklists or spreadsheets. The manager and provider must be able to supply evidence they are satisfied that all staff working at the centre are fit to do so and that recruitment and selection arrangements comply with regulations 16 and 17 of the [Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002](#).

Where the provider uses the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) update service to

check the status of an individual's DBS certificate, the centre should be able to demonstrate how it manages and records details of any check it carries out. If any lines of enquiry require additional information, the inspector may ask to see a small sample of full personnel records.

Where members of staff are subject to transfer of undertakings (protection of employment) (TUPE) arrangements, we recognise that the new employer relies on the previous employer for recruitment records and may not have all the information, including documents required by the regulations. In this case, we still expect the new employer to hold enough relevant information to make sure staff are suitable, including DBS checks or vetting records. If there are any gaps in requirements, the new employer should have taken steps to assure themselves that the person is suitable to work in their role. This should include reference to employment records such as appraisals.

The use of surveillance

The inspector should observe how any surveillance or electronic monitoring is used in the residential family centre and discuss this with parents and staff, with specific reference to regulation 21A of the [Residential Family Centres \(Amendment\) Regulations \(2013\)](#) and the [Residential Family Centres: National Minimum Standards](#), standard 10.

Finding evidence of possible offences

If, during the course of the inspection, the inspector thinks that an offence may have been committed, they should contact a social care compliance inspector or RIM immediately to discuss whether the inspection (or monitoring visit) should continue and to take advice.

If, during the course of the inspection, the inspector finds evidence of an unregistered children's home or any other unregistered provision being operated elsewhere, they should record the details, including the provider's name, the address and any other evidence that indicates there is an unregistered service operating. The inspector should inform the provider/manager that they have recorded this information and will pass this on to their regional team to investigate.

The inspector should make it clear that any information they gather on unregistered provision being operated elsewhere will not form any part in determining the outcome of the inspection or inspection judgement. Further guidance is available in the [social care enforcement policy](#).

Implications of the Equality Act

The [Equality Act 2010](#) came into effect on 1 October 2010. The Act makes it unlawful for an employer to ask a potential employee questions about their health or disability before they are offered employment, whether on a conditional or unconditional basis.

Social care providers must comply with both the Equality Act and the remit-specific regulations that require them to employ people who are fit, both physically and mentally, for the work.

To comply with both laws, providers may give conditional offers of employment to

potential employees after the recruitment process, subject to appropriate medical and health checks.

There are a number of exemptions to the provisions in the Act. If a provider believes that an exemption applies to its recruitment of staff, it should take its own legal advice on the matter.

Inspectors will assess whether providers have a rigorous recruitment and vetting process in place, including ensuring that their employees are mentally and physically fit before they begin work as part of their inspection.

How inspectors record the evidence

Inspectors must analyse the information they gather on inspection and use their professional judgement to assess the impact on the experiences and progress of children and other service users.

Inspectors' evidence should be clear, evaluative and sufficient to support the judgements.

The evidence should tell the story of the experiences and progress of children and their families through their assessment. Evidence should not include information that could identify individuals unless it is necessary to protect a child or to support further action. In these instances, inspectors can use individuals' initials.

Inspectors can record direct quotes from children, adult service users and other interested parties in evidence to support judgements.

The record should clearly indicate the source of the evidence (for example, whether the evidence is from observation, a written record or a face-to-face interview). If evidence comes from an interview, the record must indicate the time of the interview and the interviewee's job title or relationship to the child or family.

Throughout the inspection, inspectors maintain a record of their evidence. Electronic evidence is recorded within the inspection database. Summarised evidence must be sufficient to support the judgements and any recommendations or requirements. Inspectors must ensure that the provider understands the evidence that the judgements are based on and any requirements that stem from the judgements.

After the summarised evidence has been placed in the inspection database, inspectors should not destroy any duplicate handwritten evidence until at least 10 days after the inspection. In some circumstances, inspectors will be required to keep any handwritten notes they have made during the inspection for longer. This may be necessary, for example, when legal action or a complaint about the judgement is being considered.

All handwritten evidence should be legible and dated. Handwritten evidence that has not been summarised forms part of the inspection evidence base and should therefore be scanned and added into the inspection database within 5 working days of the end of the on-site visit.

Evidence may be scrutinised for quality assurance and will be considered in the event of any complaint.

End of the inspection and feedback

The inspector will give verbal feedback of the main findings and provisional

judgements. This feedback will usually be given to the responsible individual, as appropriate. Additional senior staff from the provider may also attend, if agreed in advance with the inspector. In some circumstances, an inspector may need extra time after the inspection fieldwork to take advice before giving feedback. The day of feedback is counted as the last day of the inspection.

The inspector should:

- cover the main findings of the inspection, including both strengths and weaknesses
- clearly communicate the likely judgements
- indicate likely recommendations, with clear reference to the relevant NMS or quality standard (where relevant), providing a clear direction for improvement
- use the grade descriptors and the evidence to clearly indicate how the judgements have been reached
- confirm [when the draft report](#) will be sent to the manager for comments

Inspectors will not provide a written summary of the inspection or written feedback in advance of the inspection report being sent. Providers may choose to take their own notes at feedback.

Making requirements and recommendations

Requirements

Inspectors impose requirements when there has been a breach of a regulation.

When imposing a requirement, the inspector must make sure there is enough evidence to support the breach and be able to show that this is having an impact, or is likely to have an impact, on children and parents' experiences and progress. They must weigh up and balance evidence from more than one source to support making a requirement.

The requirement should refer to the specific regulation and be detailed enough for the registered person to be clear about what they need to do to correct the breach and a date by which they should achieve this.

In deciding whether to impose a requirement, the inspector must assess the extent of the impact, or potential impact, on the experiences and progress of children and families, and whether the matter could be dealt with more appropriately by making a recommendation.

The inspector will always impose requirements when there are significant concerns for the welfare, safety and quality of care for children and parents.

Sometimes, the registered person needs to take action to meet a requirement that they can complete quickly. Inspectors can impose a requirement with a date that is likely to be before the registered person will receive their inspection report. Here, the inspector must be clear at the inspection feedback what the requirement and its deadline is.

Recommendations

Inspectors make recommendations when necessary to improve practice.

In making a recommendation, the inspector should refer to the NMS for residential family centres. They should always give enough detail for the manager in charge to know what they need to do. The relevant part of NMS should be summarised. Inspectors may also make recommendations in relation to other relevant statutory guidance such as:

- [Working together to safeguard children](#)
- [Statutory guidance for children who run away or go missing from home or care](#)

If, during an inspection, the registered person rectifies a minor administrative error that has minimal impact on the experiences and progress of children and parents, the inspector may not need to make a requirement or recommendation about that matter. However, they may refer to it in the leadership and management section of the report.

Where the registered person has failed to comply with a requirement within the timescale set by the inspector, we will consider carefully whether it is necessary to take any enforcement action to address the breach and the associated risks to children and parents. Enforcement action may include, but is not limited to, issuing a compliance notice.

If the centre has not acted on recommendations made at a previous inspection, the inspector will consider carefully the impact of this on children and parents and may impose a requirement.

Compliance notices and enforcement action

Ofsted's compliance powers are set out in the [Care Standards Act 2000](#) and associated regulations. The [social care enforcement policy](#) has the details.

We serve a compliance notice following an inspection if:

- we consider this to be the best way to promote the welfare of children or we believe they are at risk of harm
- a registered provider has failed to comply with a requirement made at an inspection and we consider this to be the best way to deal with it

Inadequate judgements: next steps

Post-inspection debrief and case reviews

When a centre is judged inadequate for 'the overall experiences and progress of children and parents', this leads to a post-inspection debrief as soon as possible, and then a case review. The timing of the case review should be proportionate to the risk and certainly no later than 5 working days following the inspection.

The inspector and their manager have the post-inspection debrief. It provides an opportunity for them to discuss the inspection and the quality of the evidence, and to consider a recommendation for further action to take to the case review. The recommendation of further action should include the scheduling of future inspections and/or compliance action. The [social care enforcement policy](#) has detailed

information about the enforcement options available and the arrangements for following up enforcement activity.

The case review considers the recommended future action and allows the manager to decide what action to take.

Subsequent inspection activity

The timing and nature of subsequent inspection and monitoring visits are set on a case-by-case basis. If the concerns are serious, we are likely to return to carry out a monitoring visit to check that the manager and responsible person have taken sufficient steps to safeguard and protect the welfare of children and parents. A monitoring visit usually results in a published report. In exceptional circumstances, RIMs can decide not to publish monitoring reports.

An inspection visit takes place sooner if:

- further significant concerns arise during this period
- it is necessary to make statutory requirements to safeguard and protect the welfare of children and parents

Any inadequacy is serious and requires immediate action. However, in some cases, the inadequacy will derive from fire risks, health and safety hazards or other environmental factors. Although serious and high risk for families, they can often be quickly rectified. Inspectors will seek to understand how and why the serious inadequacy has occurred.

The inspection report

The report should be succinct and evaluative. Inspectors' analysis must include clear evidence for their professional judgements.

In most instances, each inspection judgement section of the report should be no more than 6 to 8 short paragraphs with each usually only 2 or 3 sentences long. Reports for settings that have several weaknesses or that have been judged outstanding may require more detailed explanations for the judgements. Inspectors should ensure that the reports are long enough to say what needs to be said and no longer.

Content of the SCCIF report

Section of report	Details
Information about this service	Brief contextual information about the service
Date and judgement of last inspection	The date and overall judgement of the last inspection
Enforcement action since the last inspection (registered providers only)	A brief summary of any enforcement activity we have taken since the last inspection
Inspection judgements	The judgements made and accompanying text

Areas for improvement	Any recommendations and statutory requirements (where relevant)
Information about this inspection	What we have looked at and information about the legal basis for the inspection
Service details	Information on the provider running the service

Quality assurance and arrangements for publishing the report

The inspector is responsible for the quality of the report. The inspector will check the completed draft report carefully before submitting to their manager for pre-publication quality checks before it is shared with the provider.

Any proposed change of judgement from the provisional judgement given at verbal feedback during the inspection will be discussed by the appropriate managers within Ofsted. On these rare occasions, the inspector must inform the provider of the revised judgements and provide reasons for the changes before the provider receives the draft report.

We will send the draft inspection report to the provider within 18 working days of the end of the inspection.

The provider will have 5 working days to comment on the draft report, process and findings.

We will consider all comments and we will respond to the comments when we share the final report with the provider. This will be within a maximum of 30 working days after the inspection.

Following the inspection, we will ask providers for feedback about the inspection through a post-inspection survey. This is sent to the provider at the same time as when they receive both the draft and final inspection reports. Feedback from providers will be used to improve the quality of inspections.

Conduct during inspections

It is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a positive working relationship based on courteous and professional behaviour. Both must follow guidance in [Ofsted's conduct during inspections](#) policy.

Concerns or complaints about an inspection

Concerns

Most of Ofsted's work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns do arise during an inspection, they should be raised with the inspector as soon as

possible during the inspection visit. This provides an opportunity to resolve the matter before the inspection is completed.

If the provider is unable to resolve the matter with the inspector, they should contact the inspector's RIM for further discussion.

Providers also have another opportunity to raise concerns about the draft inspection report, process and findings when they receive the draft report.

Complaints

If it has not been possible to resolve concerns, a formal complaint can be raised under [Ofsted's complaints procedure](#) before the final inspection report is published.

If the provider wishes to submit a formal complaint, it will have until the end of the fifth working day after receiving the final report to do so.

Monitoring visits

Monitoring visits are carried out according to the general principles of the SCCIF.

Monitoring visits are usually carried out for any of the following reasons:

- to follow up concerns
- following an inadequate inspection
- to monitor compliance with a notice

Timing and frequency

The decision to carry out a monitoring visit is usually taken at a case review. The frequency of monitoring visits is decided on a case-by-case basis and may be as frequent as weekly if needed. Timing and frequency are determined by any dates included in compliance notices and the nature of the concerns.

A compliance notice sets out the actions a provider must take by a certain date to meet the relevant service-specific regulations for children's social care providers. This is agreed and recorded at the case review.

The inspector will tell the provider that it is the subject of monitoring following enforcement action or an inadequate inspection judgement. Monitoring visits are usually unannounced.

Compliance notices

If we establish a number of actions on a statutory notice, or serve multiple statutory notices with different completion dates, then we schedule follow-up visits for each date or notice to ensure that the provider has met each specified action within the prescribed timescale.

We aim to complete follow-up visits the day after the required completion date for each notice or, at the very latest, within 5 working days of that date. In some instances, we may timetable the monitoring visit so that we can assess compliance

with more than one notice.

We may decide, in exceptional circumstances, not to carry out a follow-up visit to check that the provider has met a specific requirement in a notice. In these cases, we will accept written confirmation that the provider has taken the required action, if the written confirmation is accompanied by documentary evidence such as a photograph or a copy of a required procedure.

We make a note on the inspection database of the reasons why it was not necessary to visit, for example if a fire officer has carried out a visit and given written confirmation of action taken, copied to Ofsted.

Monitoring visits are also likely to be agreed as part of the plan for the provider once the notice of proposal to cancel has been issued.

Other circumstances where we might carry out monitoring visits include when a 'restriction of accommodation' notice is in place or when we have suspended a provider from continuing to operate.

Following the monitoring visit, we will send a report detailing the outcome of the visit. We will publish it on our [reports website](#) alongside the children's home inspection reports.

Preparing for the monitoring visit

When preparing for a monitoring visit, inspectors take into account:

- the last inspection report
- requirement(s) set out in the last inspection report
- requirement(s) set out in any compliance notice
- letters from previous monitoring inspections
- any notifications received since the last inspection
- any action plan provided by the setting
- any other information recorded on the inspection database, such as information from other agencies or complaints
- any enforcement action that should be monitored (for example, restriction of accommodation)

How inspectors carry out monitoring visits

Where the monitoring visit is carried out following an inadequate judgement, or to monitor the centre's response to compliance notices or to determine whether requirements have been completed, it should:

- determine whether the requirements have been completed, and the impact of any completed requirements on the welfare and outcomes for children and parents
- identify whether any additional concerns exist
- determine the capacity of the registered manager to sustain the changes required
- consider any further action that may need to be taken
- review the evidence in order to determine whether a new inspection judgement can be made

Where the monitoring visit is to monitor other concerns or issues, it should:

- determine whether the effectiveness of the setting has declined or improved

- determine the impact of any improvement or decline in practice on the welfare and outcomes for children and parents
- set out any further action that may need to be taken

The inspector must notify either the registered provider or registered manager when they arrive on site.

The inspector should judge how effective the improvement is and how, by tackling the requirements or issues, the setting has improved the experiences and progress of children and other service users.

To demonstrate the necessary improvement, providers and managers need to show that their actions have had a significant impact in achieving clear and sustainable progress. Good intentions and an inspirational outlook, or a recent change of manager following a period of poor leadership, do not in themselves give enough proof of the ability of the provider to sustain improvement.

Finding further concerns during monitoring visits

If it becomes clear that there are new or further issues of concern, or that in tackling the actions from the last inspection the provider has let other important aspects slip, the inspector should decide what further action needs to be taken. This includes new requirements or recommendations and compliance notices or other enforcement action such as restriction of accommodation or imposing of conditions.

If the inspector is concerned or unsure about any aspect of the visit, they can contact their RIM or a social care compliance inspector.

How inspectors gather evidence in a monitoring visit

The inspectors will question how effective the provider's actions are in:

- meeting the requirements set at the last inspection
- improving the experiences and progress of children and parents

Evidence should be recorded in the inspection database. The evidence should reflect the areas for improvement that were identified in the inspection report. This section should include evidence of the most significant strengths and weaknesses and any new areas of improvement or breaches of requirement that need to be taken forward. The inspector must decide whether the centre has let other aspects slip so that there is now cause for concern in different areas.

Inspectors must decide whether the provider demonstrates its capacity to sustain any improvements it has made. Inspectors should also decide whether the improvements are having a marked and sustained impact on all areas of weakness.

Feedback at the end of the monitoring visit

The inspector provides verbal feedback to the provider at the end of the visit. The inspector must:

- be clear about the evidence base that the judgement of improvement or continued concern is based on
- make clear any new issues to take forward

- ensure that the provider is clear about the outcome of the visit and what the next step will be, especially if a new issue has arisen or improvement is inadequate
- be clear with the provider when the next steps will be confirmed if the inspector requires further advice
- explain that the outcome of a monitoring visit is published in the form of a report on the [Ofsted reports site](#) alongside the last report
- make clear that the text of the report may differ slightly from the oral feedback, but that the substance of the issues will not change
- ensure that the provider understands that the overall judgement of inadequate has not changed (where relevant), although progress and improvements may have been made be clear, if a new inspection judgement has been made, why this is the case and what the new judgement is or why no change to the judgement has been made

The inspector must contact the DCS of the placing authorities (where relevant) to advise them whether:

- there has been a change of judgement and what that new judgement is and the nature and effectiveness of any improvements
- there has been no change of judgement and either the original concerns remain or new ones have emerged

Monitoring reports

Ofsted will publish all monitoring reports on its [reports website](#), although regional directors can decide not to publish monitoring reports in exceptional circumstances.

At the beginning of the report, inspectors should provide a concise, clear explanation of the issues that we monitored at the visit. This explanation should accurately reflect the message given to the registered manager/person-in-charge when we announced the visit.

The next sentence should then state when we last visited the setting, and for what reason.

Monitoring reports should outline the significant developments and evidence of progress that has occurred since the last visit. They should clearly explain the action the provider has taken to address the requirements and the impact of any improvement, or not, on the care, experiences and progress of children and any other service users.

The report must:

- set out the reason(s) for and purpose of the visit (if the visit is to follow up enforcement activity, the letter should clearly set this out, for example, 'This home is subject to a restriction of accommodation order. We are concerned that... In order to evaluate the progress the home has made in addressing these concerns, we carried out a monitoring visit on...'; where this relates to compliance notices, there should be a short summary of the number of notices and an overview of the areas for concern)
- outline any significant developments and clearly explain the action the provider has taken to address the requirements and the impact
- evaluate where progress has been made and where progress has not been made
- clearly state the impact of continued concerns on children, alongside any action that Ofsted will be taking to notify placing local authorities and/or to protect children
- set out clearly what further action is needed
- set out why a new judgement has been made or the reasons why the judgement

will not be changed, if appropriate,

Inspectors must use clear language to indicate the level of concern, for example, 'this visit has raised serious concerns about care and practice in [the centre]'.

Inspectors can clearly state that the provider is likely to be subject to further enforcement action where this is the case. The details of intended action cannot be included as this may prejudice any action we are likely to take and be seen to impede the provider's right of appeal, where relevant.

Review of the monitoring report and evidence base

The monitoring visit report and evidence base will be reviewed by the inspector's manager before the draft report is sent to the provider for comment. This is to ensure that they accurately reflect the improvements made and that the evidence base supports any further enforcement action we may wish to take.

The draft monitoring report is then shared with the provider and finalised using the same process and timescales as a standard inspection report (see ['Quality assurance and arrangements for publishing the report' section](#)).

Checks on responsible individuals

The [Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002](#) require residential family centres to have a responsible individual.

A provider must demonstrate to Ofsted that the responsible individual it appoints is able to meet the requirements of regulation. Our inspectors scrutinise the steps providers have taken to determine that an appointed responsible individual is fit to supervise the management of an establishment or agency.

For further information, see [Changes to children's social care services that are registered and/or inspected by Ofsted](#).

Residential family centres with no registered manager

The [Care Standards Act 2000](#) requires any person who carries on or manages a residential family centre to be registered with Ofsted. It is a criminal offence to operate or manage a residential family centre without registering with Ofsted.

Regulations 27 and 28 of the [Residential Family Centre Regulations 2002](#) require the responsible individual to notify Ofsted if the manager is to be absent for 28 days or more or if they leave.

Providers must do this at least 28 days before a known absence of the manager and, in an emergency, within one week of the absence.

Any failure to either notify Ofsted of the absence or change of a manager, or a failure to put in place satisfactory management arrangements, will be taken into account when planning and carrying out inspections. For more information, see [Changes to children's social care services that are registered and/or inspected by Ofsted](#).

Actions to be taken may include, but are not limited to, bringing the date of the inspection forward and using this information to inform our judgement about the leadership and management of the residential family centre. If a provider fails to notify Ofsted of a change of manager, this may also influence our assessment of its fitness to manage. For more information about what regulatory action we can take, you should refer to the [social care enforcement policy](#).

Inspecting residential family centres that have no families living in them

If there are no families living at the centre, the inspector should contact the centre to find out if it is due to accept a family and decide whether a planned inspection should be postponed.

If there are no placements at the time of the inspection and families have been accommodated since the last inspection, it may be possible to use information about their placements as evidence.

Inspectors should take account of the length of time since the last family left and what evidence they are likely able to collect to support the inspection judgements.

If a residential family centre does not intend to take placements and will remain closed for some time, the inspector will complete the inspection and impose a condition that the centre will notify Ofsted if it intends to accept a placement.

The condition must be worded on the certificate as follows:

“ The residential family centre must inform Ofsted of its intention to admit families 3 months before a placement commences”

The text of the inspection report must contain the following statement:

“ The residential family centre has been closed for [state length of time]. The registered provider has indicated that the residential family centre will not be operational for [state length of time] from the date of inspection.”

If the centre decides to accept placements, it is required to inform Ofsted of its intention before it does so.

Incomplete inspections

We will apply [Ofsted's policy on incomplete inspections](#) where appropriate.

Safeguarding and child protection concerns

If serious issues of concern arise during the inspection, such as a failure to follow child protection procedures or if a child is discovered to be at immediate risk of harm, the inspector must notify the responsible individual (where relevant) or the person in charge as soon as possible. If that may compromise a child or adult's safety, the inspector must ensure that the appropriate authorities are notified immediately.

Inspectors should always follow [Ofsted's safeguarding policy](#).

Inspectors should contact their manager or regional social care compliance inspector if they need advice. The inspector ensures that the referral is made to the relevant local authority children's services and the child's allocated social worker and/or the relevant local authority adults' services and, where appropriate, the vulnerable adult's allocated social worker. You can find further guidance in [Safeguarding concerns: guidance for inspectors](#). If the concerns relate to allegations against staff, they are referred to the designated officer.

Inspectors must ensure that concerns about the safety and welfare of a child are communicated immediately to the DCS for the responsible placing local authority, where this is relevant. A record that this has been done must be kept. The regional Senior HMI should follow up the action that has been taken by the local authority.

The 'Prevent' duty

Extremism is unlikely to be a routine line of enquiry during SCCIF inspections. Inspectors should, however, be alert to signs of risks of extremism, such as literature, posters, videos or DVDs, or regular visitors to the setting where the purpose of their visit is not clear. Initial enquiries about the possibility of extremism must be directed to the manager or person in charge.

Inspectors should note the detail of any relevant concerns or referrals made by the responsible individual and how effective the multi-agency response has been. The DfE has published [advice for schools and childcare providers on the 'Prevent' duty](#).

Inspectors can contact their RIM, who may seek specialist advice. If inspectors are unable to contact their RIM and remain concerned, they should follow [Ofsted's safeguarding policy](#).

Female genital mutilation: the duty to notify police

Since 31 October 2015, when [section 74 of the Serious Crime Act 2015](#) inserted new [section 5B into the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003](#), specified regulated professionals (including social workers) must report to the police any cases of female genital mutilation in girls under 18 that they come across in their work.

The duty applies where the professional either:

- is informed by the girl that an act of female genital mutilation has been carried out on her
- observes physical signs that appear to show an act of female genital mutilation has been carried out and has no reason to believe that the act was necessary for the girl's physical or mental health or for purposes connected with labour or birth

If a child discloses information regarding female genital mutilation to an inspector, the inspector should follow [Safeguarding concerns: guidance for inspectors](#).

Reporting concerns about the administration and management of controlled drugs

If inspectors come across concerns or incidents about the safe management of controlled drugs during their normal inspection duties, or receive information through

any other source, they should email an outline of the concern and action taken to the social care policy team: socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk.

This action is in addition to any regulatory action or recommendations made as a result of the concern. Referrals should be made even when no requirements or recommendations are to be made. The social care policy team will collate all these referrals and share these with the Care Quality Commission (CQC)'s Controlled Drugs National Group.

The CQC provides [detailed information about controlled drugs](#) (examples include morphine, pethidine, methadone and Ritalin).

Use of personal data

As part of our inspection activities under the SCCIF, we may gather personal data that is necessary to help us evaluate children's social care services.

Our [personal information charter](#) sets out the standards you can expect from Ofsted when we collect, hold or use personal information, and that we will follow all applicable data protection legislation in how we treat personal information.

Our [privacy notice for social care](#) sets out in more detail what data we collect and our powers to do so, what we do with it, how long we keep it for and people's rights under data protection legislation.

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