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Open consultation

Proposals for inspecting supported accommodation

Published 10 July 2023

Applies to England

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About Ofsted

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. We inspect services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. We also inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people.

Purpose and background to the consultation

The aim of this consultation is to seek feedback on our proposals for how we will inspect supported accommodation.

The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi, the then Secretary of State (SoS) for Education, asked Ofsted in December 2021 to develop a regime for inspecting and regulating supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17. Amanda Spielman, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, agreed to this request. She highlighted the increasing reliance on semi-independent and independent accommodation for this group of children and the urgent need for more rigorous oversight of children's experiences in this provision.

Ofsted began accepting applications to register as providers of supported accommodation on 28 April 2023, when supported accommodation regulations came into force. Existing providers of supported accommodation must either have registered, or have submitted a registration application accepted by Ofsted as complete, by 27 October in order to continue to operate legally. New providers will also need to be registered with Ofsted to operate legally after this date.

We will use the responses to this consultation to inform new arrangements that we aim to introduce from April 2024, when we will begin routine inspections as agreed with the government in December 2021. Your views will help us to focus on the things that matters most for children and help us develop our evaluation criteria. The consultation runs from 10 July 2023 to 8 September 2023.

We will publish a report on the outcome of the consultation on our website in February 2024.

What we have already agreed

Inspecting at the 'provider level'

We have already agreed with the government that we will register and inspect at the 'provider level'. This means that we will register providers that may operate more than one setting across several categories of accommodation. We will not register individual premises used as supported accommodation by the provider, but all accommodation must meet the required standards.

The regulations set out 4 categories of accommodation:

- single occupancy – designed for the sole use of the child living there
- shared accommodation (ring-fenced for looked after children and care leavers only) – each child will have their own bedroom but will share communal areas; there may be care leavers over the age of 18 living at the accommodation
- shared accommodation (not ring-fenced for looked after children and care leavers) – looked after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17 may be living in this accommodation with other people who are not care-experienced and aged over 18
- supported lodgings – children are accommodated in a private residence, supported by an individual, or individuals (commonly known as supported lodgings hosts)

We will visit a representative sample of accommodation during inspections.

Frequency of inspection

We have also agreed with the government that we will inspect each provider at least once in a 3-year cycle, although we will return earlier to weaker providers.

Social care common inspection framework

We will carry out inspections of supported accommodation under the [social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\)](#).

We believe that the principles for social care inspection as set out in the SCCIF remain applicable, and the principles will continue to guide us during our inspections of supported accommodation:

- to focus on the things that matter most to children's lives – we will base the outcomes of inspections on the difference that providers are making to children
- to be consistent in our expectations of providers – wherever possible, we use the same evaluation criteria across the same areas of evidence for all SCCIF inspections
- to prioritise our work where improvement is needed most – we will return earlier to inspect weaker services that were judged to have serious and/or widespread weaknesses at their last inspection. We will retain the right to return earlier than usual to any provider where we have concerns. We will determine the frequency of inspections for all services through regular risk assessment

In line with the second principle above, we will gather evidence across the core SCCIF areas of evidence, as listed in proposal 1.

We will give the minimum notice of inspection.

Proposals

Proposal 1: 3 inspection outcomes

We propose that inspections will lead to one of 3 outcomes, each providing a summary outcome that considers evidence from the following areas:

- overall experiences and progress of children
- how well children are helped and protected
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers

This means that we will not use our usual 4-point scale for graded judgements for supported accommodation inspections in this first round of inspections.

There will be 3 possible overall outcomes following each inspection:

Consistently strong service delivery leads to typically positive experiences and progress for children. Where improvements are needed, leaders and managers take timely and effective action.

The next inspection will be within approximately 3 years.

Inconsistent quality of service delivery adversely affects children's experiences and limits their progress. Leaders and managers must make improvements.

The next inspection will be within approximately 18 months.

Serious or widespread weaknesses lead to significant concerns about the experiences and progress of children. Leaders and managers must take urgent action to address failings.

The next inspection will be within approximately 6 months.

We will make requirements when regulations are breached. We will also make recommendations for improvement. When necessary, we will carry out monitoring visits to assess progress against requirements and recommendations. We will use the full range of our enforcement powers to safeguard children's safety and welfare.

Published reports will provide a concise summary of the reasons for the inspection outcome. The outcome will be based on a balanced analysis of the provider's strengths and weaknesses.

When evaluating progress, we take into account individual children's starting points and circumstances during inspections. We recognise that even slight progress in a particular aspect of their lives may represent a significant improvement for some children. We also recognise that for some children, because of their experiences of trauma, abuse or neglect, progress is not always straightforward. Progress in one area may result in deterioration in another as they work through the impact of their past experiences.

Rationale for proposal

We are confident that, for most inspection remits, graded judgements on our usual 4-point scale remain appropriate. They provide a simple statement of quality for commissioners and other stakeholders, including children and families.

However, we are mindful of the distinct and unique context of the supported accommodation sector. It has operated without independent regulatory oversight for many years. Its scope is exceptionally diverse, covering 4 categories of provision (as set out in the [guide to supported accommodation regulations](#)) ranging from single occupancy flats to large hostels to supported lodgings and smaller communal living arrangements. Providers may apply to be registered for several categories of accommodation.

To describe effectively what we see, and to make reliable comparisons of quality across the different types of accommodation, inspection outcomes will need to reflect this complexity and diversity.

We believe that the 3-outcomes model will make our inspection findings clear and provide the necessary nuance and detail. This will make sure that good practice is recognised and that poor practice is not masked across diverse provision. This is especially important for those providers that offer a varied range of supported accommodation across several categories of provision.

The model does not yet offer an outcome that identifies exceptional practice. This would not be appropriate for a newly regulated sector, where there is no established benchmark of excellence. But we will report on excellent practice within our reports. The first outcome ('Consistently strong service delivery...') will help us and the sector to develop an understanding of the characteristics of strong or excellent services.

Our learning from the first round of inspections will inform future inspection arrangements, including how we make judgements.

Proposal 2: Notice of inspection

We propose that we should give 2 working days' notice of inspection to providers. We believe that this is the minimum notice required to carry out an efficient and effective inspection.

Rationale for proposal

This will align the notice period with other provider-level social care inspections (such as fostering and adoption agency inspections).

Keeping notice periods to a minimum reduces the demands of preparing for inspection for providers and other stakeholders. It also allows inspectors to see a clear and realistic picture of the day-to-day operation and impact of the supported accommodation service.

Having a short notice period rather than an unannounced inspection will help inspectors to arrange a suitable timetable for the inspection, including arranging to hear from children about their experiences. It will also give inspectors time to analyse the pre-inspection information and develop the right lines of enquiry. They can then make best use of their time on site and gather the best possible evidence.

Our published inspection guidance will set out clear information about:

- the information that we will require from providers when we give notice
- the usual inspection activity

Main features of effective supported accommodation

We want to make sure our inspections focus on the issues that make the most difference to children's lives. We would like to hear your views on the main features of effective supported accommodation. We have set out some of our ideas below and would like to hear yours.

Your views will help us develop the detailed evaluation criteria.

Evaluation criteria describes the benchmarks of effective practice and help providers to know what we expect to see during inspections. Inspectors evaluate their evidence against these benchmarks and their evaluation informs the outcome of the inspection.

We have carried out a review of the available research into the experiences and outcomes of children in supported accommodation, including findings from serious case reviews and the views of care-experienced children and young people. We will report on the main findings from the review in early 2024 when we publish our response to this consultation and our inspection guidance.

To establish the final evaluation criteria, we will draw on:

- feedback from this consultation
- targeted consultation with stakeholders about the draft evaluation criteria, after the online consultation closes
- the research evidence

Main features of overall experiences and progress of children

- The accommodation is of good quality and meets children's individual needs
- Staff and supported lodgings hosts are suitably skilled and have strong relationships with children
- Plans for children are effective
- Children are supported to maintain strong, supportive social networks
- Children are well engaged with the wider community
- Children have good access to technology
- Support for children responds to their changing needs
- There is effective support for children's emotional and physical health
- There is strong support for children's education, training and employment
- Children have financial security
- Children's views are heard and acted on
- Children are involved in decision-making and plans for their futures
- Children's rights and entitlements are met
- Children are helped to develop practical and self-care skills

Main features of how well children are helped and protected

- Children feel safe and settled where they live
- Risks are identified, understood and managed effectively in order to keep children safe
- Leaders and staff respond effectively to children who may go missing or may be at risk of harm
- Staff manage situations well and apply and clear, consistent boundaries that contribute to children feeling safe

Main features of the effectiveness of leaders and managers

- Leaders and managers have high ambitions and expectations for children, and are committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for them
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the progress that children are making
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the service's strengths and weaknesses, and take effective action as a result
- Staff are well supported through supervision, induction and training
- The service is achieving its aims and objectives, in line with its statement of purpose
- There are positive and productive relationships between all professionals, which ensures the

best possible support for children

- Leaders and managers take prompt and appropriate action when the responses from other services are not effective
- Leaders and managers actively promote equality and diversity, and tackle bullying and discrimination effectively

Consultation process

We welcome your responses to this consultation. The consultation opens on 10 July 2023 and closes on 8 September 2023.

We will publish a report on the outcome of this consultation in February 2024.

Ways to respond to the consultation

Please respond using our electronic survey.

[Respond to the consultation](#)

Please submit your response to the consultation using our online survey. If you have any difficulties using the SmartSurvey tool, please email EYRegulatoryandSocialCare@ofsted.gov.uk with the details.

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