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Guidance

# Cafcass inspection framework

Updated 2 February 2024

**Applies to England**

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## Introduction

This framework sets out how Ofsted inspects Cafcass through:

- a full inspection of the national organisation in a 3-year window
- focused visits
- monitoring visits (only if Cafcass is judged to be inadequate)
- activity outside inspection

This framework and guidance are to help inspectors carry out inspections of, and visits to, Cafcass. We will periodically review and amend this framework and evaluation criteria.

Inspections of Cafcass (including focused and monitoring visits) are delivered under His Majesty's Chief Inspector's (HMCI) duty to inspect as set out in [sections 143–145 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#).

## Inspection principles

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

- intelligent: all of our work will be evidence-led, and we will work to ensure that our evaluation tools and frameworks will be valid and reliable

- responsible: our frameworks will be fair. We will seek to reduce inspection burdens and make our expectations and findings clear
- focused: we will target our time and resources where they can lead directly to improvement

Our approach to inspecting Cafcass is further underpinned by 3 principles that apply to all social care inspections. Inspection should:

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

Inspectors will work with leaders and staff constructively and will act with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect.

## **Inspection approach**

This framework includes:

- Cafcass sharing an annual self-evaluation of the quality and impact of its social work practice
- an annual engagement meeting between Ofsted and Cafcass to review the self-evaluation, to reflect on what is happening in Cafcass and to inform how we engage with each other in future
- focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children
- a full inspection in a 3-year window, when we will make judgements using our 4-point scale

We have described each part of this approach in more detail later in the framework.

## **Applying a proportionate and risk-based approach to inspection**

There is no fixed cycle or end date for the inspection programme. Under this framework, we use the intelligence and information we have to inform decisions

about when and how to inspect.

There will be times when concerns arise about Cafcass. We will decide on a case-by-case basis how to respond. This will include considering whether to carry out an inspection, at which we make a graded judgement, or whether a focused visit would be more appropriate. A focused visit gives Cafcass and us the opportunity to identify what is going well and what needs to improve before the next judgement inspection. The timing and outcome of any previous inspection activity will influence our decision-making.

We will publish the focused visit letter setting out the areas that Cafcass needs to address. We will review the progress in these areas through the self-evaluation and the annual engagement meeting until the next inspection happens.

This approach aims to support improvement, while still holding Cafcass to account in meeting its legal responsibilities to children and families involved in family court proceedings.

Inspections will not usually begin over the Christmas and New Year period. The only activities that might take place in August would be focused visits by agreement, or if concerns arise such that agreement is not needed.

## **Deferring an inspection**

While it is important that we carry out our planned inspections wherever possible, we understand that sometimes there may be reasons that this is not possible. A deferral may be requested during the initial notification phone call or at the earliest opportunity afterwards. We will decide whether to grant a deferral in line with our [deferral policy](#). We make these decisions on a case-by-case basis.

## **Activity outside of inspection**

### **Cafcass self-evaluation of social work practice**

Each year, we will ask Cafcass to share a self-evaluation of social work practice

within family court proceedings and to meet with our representatives to discuss it. This part of the framework is voluntary, but it plays an important role in our understanding of Cafcass and how it works.

Engagement between Ofsted and Cafcass outside of inspection will help us to apply the risk-based and proportionate approach that this framework offers. It will help us to carry out our inspections and visits more efficiently. It will also help ensure that inspection frequency and arrangements are appropriate for Cafcass as the inspected body.

There is no set time each year that we ask Cafcass to share a self-evaluation. To be most effective, this should happen before the planned annual engagement meeting, but there is no expectation that Cafcass schedule its work around our timelines. Ideally, we ask Cafcass to share this early enough for us to analyse its content, but not so far in advance that the information is out of date by the time of the annual engagement meeting.

The self-evaluation should answer 3 questions:

- What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in private and public law family court proceedings?
- How do you know it?
- What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

Cafcass's response to these questions will help us to see whether leaders and managers have a grip on practice and are taking suitable action.

There is no prescribed format or content for the self-evaluation. Cafcass should apply the following principles. The self-evaluation:

- should answer the 3 questions set out above
- should set out the main themes and learning
- should make sense as a standalone document (appendices can be included, but should be kept to a minimum)
- may be an existing document or combination of documents
- should be succinct, focused and evaluative; overly long self-evaluation is unlikely to be helpful to Cafcass or inspectors

The self-evaluation should draw on existing documentation and activity. It should reflect Cafcass's business as usual so as to avoid additional burden. We do not expect Cafcass to carry out additional work to inform the self-evaluation. It is for

Cafcass to determine which documentation and information to draw on for the self-evaluation.

The following list offers some suggested sources:

- an overview of how Cafcass evaluates the impact of social work practice with children and families in family proceedings
- high-level performance reports that give the most recent position of case audit plans
- case audit summaries of learning
- recent learning about frontline private and public law practice, for example from complaints or child safeguarding practice and management reviews
- feedback from children and families

If the self-evaluation identifies weaknesses in practice and Cafcass has credible plans to take clear, appropriate and effective action in response, we will treat this as effective leadership rather than an automatic trigger for an inspection or focused visit.

## Annual engagement meeting

The meeting should be carried out in the spirit of transparency and benefit everyone involved.

The meeting is not an opportunity for inspectors to evaluate direct social work practice with children and families. The intelligence gathered from the meeting will inform any plans for future inspection activity and focused visits.

The meeting should cover:

- the content of the self-evaluation – what leaders know about practice and outcomes, and the evidence that supports this
- the impact of the self-evaluation – what leaders are doing to address weaknesses in practice and maintain or improve good practice, including evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of their actions
- actions taken in response to previous inspections
- Cafcass's current financial and professional practice context within the wider family justice system

- the possible scope of a focused visit
- the approximate timing of the next self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting

A representative from Ofsted will chair the meeting. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Cafcass will determine who else attends from Cafcass. For the meeting to be effective, those attending the meeting should have a clear reason to be there.

Ofsted and the CEO will agree the agenda in advance of the meeting and ensure that there is sufficient time to discuss the relevant issues.

We will write to the CEO within a month of the meeting. The letter will not be published nor contain any judgements about practice. It will set out:

- the date of the meeting and who attended
- a factual summary of the agenda items discussed
- the possible scope of a future focused visit
- the approximate timing of the following year's self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting
- any next steps agreed for either Cafcass or us

## Scope

Within the scope of the inspection, we will look at the experiences of children and families for whom Cafcass has a role in family proceedings. This includes children and families who are the subject of:

- public family law care and supervision applications where a local authority is the applicant
- private family law applications related to contact or residence proceedings
- applications for children to be placed in secure accommodation under section 25 of the Children Act 1989
- adoption proceedings, including adoption from care, a step-parent adoption, inter-country adoption, or adoption of a relinquished baby
- application for leave to remove a child from the UK jurisdiction
- application for parental orders linked to surrogacy arrangements

# Inspections

Inspections will focus on family court advisers' direct practice with families.

Inspectors will:

- evaluate and consider a sample of public and private law cases where children are involved in order to judge the quality of frontline practice and management and the difference it makes to the lives of children and their families and carers. This will include discussions with family court advisers, including their managers and other professionals working with the child; in the case of children in care, this may include the independent reviewing officer
- with their agreement, meet as appropriate with children, parents and carers
- shadow practitioners in their day-to-day work, for example by observing practice in court and work with children and families
- speak to key partners, for example local authorities, HM Courts & Tribunals Service and the family judiciary
- review copies of quality assurance activity, case audits from the 6 months before the inspection and any associated action plans derived from the audits
- review data that Cafcass uses to manage the delivery of its service
- review responses to complaints

Inspectors will gather evidence across the scope of this framework. We will usually give 5 working days' notice of the inspection. The inspection team will be a lead inspector and usually up to 10 social care inspectors working in teams of 2 in different geographical areas.

Inspection teams may also include an additional inspector who will be shadowing the work of their colleagues. Any activity they carry out will be for the purpose of their training and development or to evaluate the inspection framework and methodology. They will not carry out any inspection work independently or gather evidence that will inform the inspection judgements.

## Notice period (off site)

Usual day of the week	Activities
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Monday	Lead inspector phone call to the CEO to announce the inspection Afternoon 'set-up' discussion between lead inspector and CEO (by telephone or in person)
Tuesday	Off site preparation
Wednesday	Cafcass shares child-level data, information about audits and performance and management information
Thursday	Cafcass provides access to case materials for off-site analysis
Friday	Telephone conference inspection team meeting (including an Ofsted analytical officer)

## Pre-fieldwork analysis week (off site)

Usual day of the week	Activities
Monday to Thursday	Full team off site evaluating case materials and other evidence
Friday	Full inspection team meeting

## Week 1

Usual day of the week	Activities
Monday	Full team on site from lunchtime gathering evidence
Tuesday to Thursday	Full team on site gathering evidence
Friday	Feeding back inspection findings so far

## Week 2

Usual day of the week	Activities
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Monday	Full team on site from lunchtime gathering evidence
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Tuesday to Thursday	Full team on site gathering evidence
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Friday	Feeding back inspection findings
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## Inspecting against the scope and making judgements based on the evaluation criteria

Inspectors inspect across the scope of the inspection and record their evidence under the judgement area. Each judgement area has several criteria that describe a good service and what good experiences and progress for children look like.

## Inspectors do not have to gather evidence against each individual criterion

The evaluation criteria (see below) help the inspection team arrive at an agreed judgement on the 4-point grading scheme.

## Off-site evaluation

Off-site evaluation and planning are important parts of all inspections. All inspectors will have access to all data and case materials provided by Cafcass. An Ofsted senior analytical officer will coordinate the data, provide a pre-inspection analysis (PIA) and agree priorities for the inspection with the inspection team.

The senior analytical officer will ensure that the PIA contains the information the lead inspector and team will need to inform the inspection planning and on-site activity. This will summarise:

- a contextual overview of Cafcass
- findings from relevant inspections (including previous focused visits)
- regional intelligence about the effectiveness of the local family justice area
- findings from published child safeguarding practice reviews
- analysis of published statistics and regional comparisons
- evidence from whistleblowing or complaints to Ofsted
- intelligence held by Ofsted, including events of public concern, such as high-profile court cases or media issues
- search and review of recently published documentation, such as the Cafcass annual report

The PIA will include any analysis of the most recent self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting with Cafcass.

[Annex A](#) lists the information that we request from Cafcass at the start of the inspection.

The lead inspector will have time allocated, before fieldwork begins, to review the pre-inspection analysis and the information from Annex A. They will use this information to:

- ensure that the fieldwork is properly focused and used to the best effect in collecting first-hand evidence
- decide which site(s) within Cafcass to visit during inspection
- identify initial lines of enquiry for the inspection
- allocate information to the inspection team for them to analyse

Only initial lines of enquiry will be generated at this point. These will be few in number and themed around priority areas. The lead inspector will share verbally the lines of enquiry with Cafcass at the beginning of the inspection. The lead inspector will explain to the CEO how these lines will be pursued and what, if any, specific information is required from them as a result.

We do not expect Cafcass to produce documents and data in response to these initial lines of enquiry unless specifically requested by the lead inspector. During the inspection, additional requests for further documentation will be kept to an absolute minimum and agreed by the lead inspector.

All inspectors have time allocated to prepare for the inspection. All team inspectors must read the PIA and familiarise themselves with the relevant material and profile of

Cafcass before arriving on site. The lead inspector is likely to identify other documents for inspectors to read before the on-site activity.

Inspectors must review the information in Annex A provided by Cafcass. The lead inspector may decide that some documents must be read by all team members; others will be read by only one inspector and then summarised for the team. Some documents may be used as reference material and read only when required. The lead inspector will ensure that key points of analysis are collated and disseminated to the inspection team to inform the inspection.

## **Notifying Cafcass and requesting information**

The lead inspector will ensure that Cafcass (usually the CEO) is notified by telephone of the inspection by 9.30am 5 working days before the fieldwork starts. As part of this telephone call, the lead inspector will also arrange to meet with the CEO or the most senior manager available at the earliest opportunity when they arrive on site. Immediately following the telephone call to Cafcass, the lead inspector will email the CEO to confirm the start of the inspection and ask them to share information set out in [Annex A](#). Annex A lists information we think Cafcass will already maintain to inform its oversight and management of its service. On this basis, we do not consider that the information we request is unreasonable.

The lead inspector will offer the CEO an opportunity for a conversation later the same day to give the CEO time to bring together the relevant staff. This conversation will usually be by phone, but the lead inspector may meet with the CEO in person if it is practical to do so. This conversation will help the lead inspector and the CEO to establish a constructive and professional relationship and give them a shared understanding of the starting point of the inspection.

If the CEO is not available, the lead inspector will speak with or email the most senior manager available and ask them to notify the CEO. The non-availability of the CEO or a senior manager will not delay the start of the inspection.

The lead inspector will ask the CEO to identify a link support person for the inspection. It is important that the link person has ready access to the CEO and senior leaders and sufficient authority to be able to respond to the lead inspector's requests.

In the time before inspectors are on site, the lead inspector will work with the link person and/or CEO to prepare for the on-site activity. Together, they will:

- answer questions about the scope of the inspection
- outline the format and methodology of the inspection, which will focus almost exclusively on practice with children and families. Meetings will be kept to a minimum, will only look into matters arising from case evaluations and will only take place at the lead inspector's request
- discuss how inspectors will directly consider the experiences of children and families as an integral part of the inspection. When opportunities arise during the fieldwork to speak with or observe contact with children and families, the local Cafcass staff will be asked to obtain their agreement to observe any meetings and speak to inspectors
- agree practical arrangements, such as workspace, access to files and information technology systems, and any staff support required to access these files and systems
- agree arrangements to meet with the CEO and their senior leadership team for regular keep-in-touch meetings and the feedback meeting
- provide contact details for the lead inspector, inspection team members and the allocated Senior HMI responsible for quality assurance
- ask whether any steps need to be taken to ensure the well-being of the CEO during the inspection. The lead inspector will ask who to contact if the inspection team needs to pass on any concerns about someone's well-being
- provide the link person with the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns, or to seek clarification before the inspection, and explain how they will be able to raise any matters during the inspection itself
- provide information for affected/relevant staff, such as copies of the summary of the framework explaining the purpose of the inspection
- gain an understanding of how the local area services are structured, as well as any issues specific to the site(s) being inspected
- provide an opportunity for Cafcass representatives to explain their local and national context, key strengths and challenges
- clarify whether there are any serious incidents that are awaiting investigation. This should include significant and current investigations (including police investigations), national or local learning reviews and local issues of high media interest

During the week before inspectors arrive on site, an Ofsted analytical officer will ask to speak with an analyst at Cafcass. This is to discuss issues about data quality, performance documents, the performance reporting process and the types and breadth of management information produced.

# On-site inspection

The lead inspector and up to 10 team inspectors will arrive on sites across the national organisation on Monday. All inspectors will show their inspector identity badges. They do not need to carry copies of their DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks.

The lead inspector will meet with the CEO or deputy at Cafcass's headquarters or another prearranged venue. At this meeting, the lead inspector will review the matters and arrangements discussed in the previous week. The lead inspector will answer any remaining questions and ask leaders to confirm that the practical arrangements inspectors requested are in place.

The team inspectors will work in teams of 2, each led by a deputy lead inspector. When the deputy lead inspector arrives on site, they will meet with the assistant director and/or the most senior manager available. At this meeting, the deputy lead inspector will explain the inspection team's plans while on site in that location.

When planning the on-site aspect of inspection, the deputy lead inspectors should ensure that:

- support is provided to facilitate communication with children, care leavers, carers and parents who require additional support
- the plan allows realistic travel time for inspectors between activities
- the plan allows sufficient time and flexibility for inspectors to pursue lines of enquiry
- staff are given the opportunity to provide their evidence separately to those who manage them
- if the need for any meeting arises as a result of evaluating children's experiences, the lead inspector asks for this as soon as the need becomes apparent; these meetings may be held by telephone as well as in person
- the way inspectors' time is planned includes opportunities for team members to reflect on, record and analyse evidence, individually and as a team

The schedule for the inspection will develop throughout the inspection in response to issues emerging from evaluating children's experiences. The lead inspector has overall responsibility for the schedule, working in conjunction with the deputy lead inspectors.

On-site inspection activity will not normally continue after 6pm on any fieldwork day.

# Making judgements at inspections

Inspectors will make a graded judgement on the overall effectiveness of Cafcass, which derives from:

- the quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with children and families
- the quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with children and families
- the impact of leaders on private and public law practice with children and families

Inspectors will make their graded judgements on a 4-point scale:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement to be good
- inadequate

Inspectors will evaluate the experiences of children and families involved in family court proceedings using the evaluation criteria as a benchmark. Inspectors will use professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings. A judgement of good will be made if the inspection team concludes that the evidence overall sits most appropriately with a finding of good. This is what we describe as 'best fit'.

The overall effectiveness judgement is derived from findings in each of the 3 other judgement areas. Inspectors will use both evidence and their professional judgement to award the overall effectiveness grade.

The overall effectiveness judgement will take account of any widespread or serious failures that led to children's welfare not being safeguarded and whether leaders and managers have been ineffective in challenging such weak practice and making the necessary improvements.

It is possible for the impact of leaders to be judged good or requires improvement to be good even if any of the other judgements given are inadequate. Inspectors will make this judgement if leaders and managers show sufficient understanding of the widespread or serious failure and have taken effective action to prioritise, challenge and make sustained improvement to services. Inspectors will acknowledge this in the report. The overall judgement will be inadequate when the quality and effectiveness of either private or public law practice with children and families is

inadequate.

If, at the end of fieldwork, Cafcass is judged inadequate, inspectors will follow [the section in this guidance on monitoring visits](#).

## Focused visits

Focused visits will happen between inspections. We will usually give 5 working days' notice of the visit. Usually, 6 inspectors will be on site in teams of 2 in up to 3 locations for 2 days contained within 1 week. Focused visits will include some or all of the same inspection activity as an inspection.

## Notice period – off site

Usual day of the week	Activities
Monday	Lead inspector off-site evaluation of information
Tuesday	Lead inspector phone call to CEO to announce the focused visit Afternoon 'set-up' telephone conference – lead inspector and CEO
Wednesday	Cafcass shares child-level data, information about audits and performance and management information
Thursday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence
Friday	Telephone conference team meeting

## Week 1

Usual day of the week	Activities
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Monday	Off-site evaluation of evidence
Tuesday	Full team on site gathering evidence
Wednesday	Full team on site gathering evidence and providing feedback

This is an indicative timetable and actual days on site may vary. Milestones will be adjusted to reflect actual on-site fieldwork.

A focused visit will look at one or more aspects of service, themes or cohorts of children. Inspections will use evaluation criteria from this framework.

We will make the final decision about the focused visit topic to be covered. The decision will be based on one or more of the following:

- if a specific area of service has been identified by Cafcass as an example of good or outstanding practice
- if a specific area of service has been identified as one that needs to improve or an area where themes, trends and issues are identified
- if an agreement between us and Cafcass has been made that a specific focus will support Cafcass's improvement journey
- if we decide to carry out a short programme in a particular area of service, which will then lead to a thematic overview

## **Focused visit topics**

Each focused visit will cover part of the scope of an inspection. The principal focus will be the quality and impact of practice (either public law, private law or both) with children and families. We will consider the following factors when deciding the focus of the visits:

- a clear link to Cafcass's statutory functions
- previous inspection outcomes and Cafcass's current improvement priorities
- information and intelligence received since the last inspection or focused visit

In each focused visit, inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of:

- performance management
- management oversight
- supervision
- quality assurance
- continuous professional development of the workforce

## **Findings at focused visits**

Inspectors will not make graded judgements at the outcome of a focused visit. Nor will they be able to indicate what the grade may have been if it were an inspection because focused visits do not cover everything that is considered at an inspection. The outcome will be findings about strengths and areas for improvement, reported in a published letter.

If inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will identify areas for priority action. An area for priority action is either:

- an area of serious weakness that is placing children at risk of inadequate protection or significant harm as a result of the advice given to the family court
- an unnecessary delay in progressing children's cases that results in their welfare not being safeguarded and promoted

Priority actions may result from particular or localised failings to protect or care for children as well as from systemic failures or deficits. Some examples of areas for priority action are:

- unallocated children's cases and/or significant delays in safeguarding the welfare of a child
- systemic failure or significant weakness in practice that either exposes children to significant risk of harm or fails to safeguard and promote the child's welfare
- a significant shortfall in capacity (frontline staffing numbers, qualifications and expertise) or deficit in management oversight and supervision that impacts adversely on children, families or the quality and appropriateness of advice to the family court

Inspectors will use findings from focused visits when planning their next inspection. The evidence from a focused visit will not be used as primary evidence but may enable inspectors to target their evidence-gathering more effectively.

# Monitoring Cafcass following an overall inadequate inspection judgement

If Cafcass is judged inadequate, we will carry out monitoring activity that includes an action planning visit, monitoring visits and a re-inspection. The lead inspector will inform the CEO of this at the feedback meeting for the inspection where the inadequate judgement is given.

Monitoring visits will focus on where improvement is needed the most. Inspectors will monitor and report on Cafcass's progress since the inspection. Inspectors will also check that performance in other areas has not declined since the inspection. If new concerns emerge, inspectors are likely to look at these on the monitoring visits.

The timetable for a monitoring visit will mirror that of a [focused visit](#).

## Inspection methodology

This section covers what inspectors will do to gather and evaluate evidence and report their findings.

### Inspection activity and gathering evidence

Almost all inspection evidence will be gathered by looking at individual children's experiences. This will be largely through meeting with practitioners to understand the nature and impact of their work with children and families, including scrutinising electronic records. Inspectors will work with leaders and staff constructively and will act with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect.

Evaluating individual children's records that have already been audited by Cafcass is an effective way for inspectors to understand practice and target their evidence-gathering. If Cafcass's evaluation of practice is in line with our evaluation, this will usually reduce the need for further primary evidence in that part of the inspection. When evaluating individual children's experiences, inspectors will not grade individual pieces of work.

When inspectors select the children whose experiences they will evaluate, they will

take into account the factors set out below:

- age, gender, disability and ethnicity
- the factors that have led to the family court proceedings, for example abuse, neglect or exploitation experienced by children in public law and the impact of domestic abuse, parental alienation and parental conflict considered in private law

The lead inspector will take into account any lines of enquiry identified before arriving on site or particular children who are identified through the sample information, such as children who appear to have experienced significant delay.

It is important that inspectors examine good practice as part of the inspection. We encourage Cafcass to provide examples of cases that demonstrate good practice that it has identified through its case audit activity.

In all inspections where the child's case is looked at retrospectively, inspectors will base their judgements on contemporary practice. This means looking at practice in examples usually not older than 6 months before the inspection. Inspectors may also need to evaluate practice before this to understand a child's journey.

Judgements will generally be based on practice that has an impact on the child's current situation. However, where necessary, for example in repeat applications, inspectors will read some historical information to understand the child's journey, their progress and how this relates to the plans for their future.

Cafcass should arrange for each inspector to have individual access to all relevant electronic systems.

Inspectors will review a sample of practitioners' supervision records, including those related to the sample of children.

## **Protecting personal data**

During inspections and visits, inspectors will gather personal information that is necessary to help them evaluate services. Our [privacy notice](#) sets out what data we collect, what we do with it, how long we keep it for and people's rights under the Data Protection Act 2018.

# Hearing the views of children and their families

There are various opportunities to hear the views of children and their families. Inspectors will use these whenever possible. These include:

- direct testimony – for example, speaking to those whose cases we are looking at closely; inspectors will gather views sensitively, in a way that does not impact on ongoing family court proceedings
- views of representative groups – for example, from the Family Justice Young People's Board
- views directly recorded in case files and meeting minutes
- views expressed by practitioners
- views expressed by others advocating for children and their families
- analysis of the views of children routinely gathered by Cafcass
- reviewing complaints made by children

Inspectors will talk to children whenever possible during the inspection, although these discussions will not always be face to face. When talking to or about children, inspectors are interested in hearing how the children's rights are being considered and how their wishes and feelings are being taken into account in formulating Cafcass's advice to the family court.

Inspectors will provide Cafcass with guidance to help prepare children, carers and families to be involved in the inspection. Inspectors must make sure that children and their families understand what their involvement in the inspection means before speaking to them about their experiences.

Inspectors will discuss any risks or ethical issues concerned with meeting children and birth family members with the Cafcass family court adviser.

Inspectors will work with agencies to ensure that any child with communication difficulties has access to the necessary support to facilitate their full involvement in the inspection.

We will also want to see and hear about the impact of Cafcass's own consultation with children. We will want to see how children's feedback has been asked for, both individually and collectively, and taken into account to improve practice and services.

## Documentation

The inspection team will review the documentation requested in Annex A. If Cafcass wants to share any additional information after it has provided Annex A, it must discuss this with the lead inspector first. Cafcass must be clear why it believes the information is relevant to the inspection. The lead inspector will make the final decision about whether to accept the information as part of the inspection evidence.

### **When inspectors are seeking further information**

We sometimes have to ask for further information. This may be about a service or strategy or about an individual child's experiences.

Requests for further information about an individual child's experiences should not be seen as a negative. Sometimes it is because inspectors have insufficient information to know that a child's welfare is being safeguarded. For example, they may be unable to find the information or it may not have been recorded. After the Cafcass senior leadership team has responded to the request, inspectors are able to make a more informed judgement about the quality and impact of the practice they have seen. In some cases, requests for further information enable inspectors to explore good practice.

## **Engaging with leaders and staff**

### **Interviews with practitioners, managers and stakeholders**

Inspectors will triangulate evidence by talking to practitioners and/or managers, either by telephone or in person. They will follow our code of conduct, acting with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect. Lead inspectors will only request that groups of people are brought together for discussions or meetings if this is the only way to triangulate evidence and is required to explore lines of enquiry arising from case evaluations.

When talking to family court advisers about practice, inspectors are likely to ask questions about a range of issues, for example:

- the quality and impact of supervision and management oversight
- the ways in which they are helped to strengthen families and minimise risk
- workloads and workload management
- the availability, quality and impact of training and development opportunities
- the impact on practice through multi-agency training and the dissemination of

learning from national or local learning reviews

Inspectors will usually speak about these issues alone with family court advisers. They may ask for the practitioner's line manager to be present.

If these individuals are not available, inspectors may talk to those who are deputising for them in their absence.

In most cases, inspectors will want to have confidential conversations with staff and will usually ask to speak to them alone so that staff can express their views freely. However, individuals may ask to have a colleague present to support them if they prefer.

If inspectors see that a staff member is upset or distressed at any point during the inspection, inspectors will respond sensitively. Where appropriate, inspectors will consider suitable adjustments to enable the staff member to continue. Where appropriate, inspectors will inform those responsible for the person's well-being. The inspector will also contact their manager/regional duty manager to take advice.

### **Engaging the senior leaders during an inspection/visit**

The lead or deputy lead inspector will inform the CEO or another member of the senior staff of emerging findings throughout the inspection/visit. This is likely to be on a daily basis through a brief face-to-face meeting, which may involve other inspectors from the team. This gives Cafcass leaders the opportunity to understand and respond to emerging findings.

These meetings will be short and focus on the main findings arising from the inspection. They will not be a description of all the inspection activity. The lead or deputy lead inspector should check that the senior leaders are clear about the relationship between the evidence and the emerging and/or substantiated findings.

Although the lead or deputy lead inspectors will always offer senior leaders opportunities for engagement, Cafcass may choose whether or not to accept. For example, they may not be available to meet with inspectors due to other commitments. The extent to which senior leaders engage with the inspection team will not, in itself, influence inspection judgements.

### **Local family justice system**

In evaluating Cafcass services, it is important to understand Cafcass's performance in the context of the wider family justice system and to gather a wide range of valuable evidence. Inspectors may contact local authorities to hear their experience

of Cafcass's performance and get their perspective on the local family justice system.

Inspectors will usually speak with the local judiciary (likely to be the local designated family judge and/or the chair of the family proceedings court bench) and/or court administration (court manager, family court listing officer or clerk to the family justices). Interviews will usually be by telephone.

We will not make judgements about family justice partner organisations or the judiciary in the report but may report system-wide strengths and weaknesses. The range of information gathered will vary according to the lines of enquiry in each area and will be proportionate.

## **Recording evidence**

Throughout an inspection or visit, inspectors will maintain a record of the evidence they gather. The record will include their individual and team analysis of the evidence. Inspectors will use an electronic recording system for this.

Each inspector will maintain records of the evidence they gather throughout the inspection. Inspectors must record the source, date and time of the evidence they gather. If Cafcass provides any evidence on paper that is essential to the inspection, the inspector will ask it to add electronic copies to the online portal.

The lead and deputy lead inspector must allocate time for team inspectors to analyse their record and add individual evaluative summaries to the team's shared evidence record.

Inspectors should meet at least once a day to discuss their individual findings and record shared evaluative summaries. These shared summaries will usually draw on findings from multiple sources of evidence gathered by more than one inspector – they are essential for underpinning feedback at keep-in-touch meetings, judgements and the inspection report.

Evaluative summaries must set out the inspector's or team's view about the quality, effectiveness and extent of practice. They should not simply describe the practice that is in place. A 3-part structure can help to achieve summaries that are clear and concise and that inform judgements and reporting effectively:

- start with an overall evaluative statement about the aspect of practice being



considered

- briefly summarise the evidence underpinning this statement
- end with a comment on the difference this makes for children

Inspectors should always consider and record what the evidence about practice with children and families tells them about the impact of Cafcass leaders.

When considered as a whole, the team's shared evaluative summaries must cover the scope of the inspection or visit and be clearly linked to the relevant headings in the evaluation criteria. They must reflect strengths and areas for improvement found across the scope. The number of summaries is less important than their quality.

All inspectors are responsible for reviewing the evidence record to identify gaps and make sure that the record is of good quality. The lead/deputy lead inspector will decide when sufficient evidence has been recorded about an issue so that it can be closed.

Inspectors should record individual summaries in the evidence record if they have serious concerns about the safety and welfare of a child that Cafcass does not appear to be aware of and/or is not responding to appropriately. Inspectors should also record summaries of examples of outstanding practice.

Inspectors should not use the names of individual children or family members in their evidence records. They should use case reference numbers and/or initials. Inspectors should use job titles or roles for individual staff or practitioners.

The quality assurance manager will review the evidence record and challenge the team's findings to make sure that the 2 align. They will add their analysis to the evidence record, which may include recommending areas for further investigation by the inspection team.

## **Finalising evidence**

Towards the end of the inspection or focused visit, the inspection team will complete its inspection activities and inspectors will meet to agree their findings and judgements. This meeting should be informed by clear and aligned evaluation of the evidence.

At the end of a focused visit, the team will agree the main strengths and areas for improvement and whether there are any priority actions.

Before formal feedback at the end of an inspection, the lead inspector and quality assurance manager will usually inform the CEO of the provisional judgements from

the inspection.

## **Feedback at the end of the inspection/visit**

On the final day on site, the lead inspector will invite the CEO and senior leaders to meet with the inspection team to hear the provisional findings and/or judgements and, most importantly, the evidence that supports them. The meeting should encourage dialogue between the inspection team and Cafcass about this evidence.

Because the strengths and areas for development should have been discussed in the daily meetings, there should be no surprises on the final day.

Senior leaders are invited to engage in this final discussion about the evidence supporting the provisional findings and/or judgements to:

- understand the evidence that the team used to reach findings and/or judgements to support improvement (where judged to be good, this includes understanding the factors that kept it from being judged outstanding)
- participate in a dialogue about the areas for development that are likely to follow the inspection and to ensure that senior leaders fully understand the issues that have been identified
- understand what will make the most difference for Cafcass and the children and families that it serves
- support understanding of the evidence so that the findings and/or judgements of the inspection can be disseminated accurately and inform internal discussions about improvement

To make findings and/or judgements clear and to inform the discussion with Cafcass, inspectors should share their analysed, prioritised and themed summary evidence. They will highlight strengths and areas for development across the scope of the inspection/visit. This is an opportunity for dialogue with senior leaders to help them understand the findings and not just a scripted presentation by inspectors. The meeting will usually last no longer than 60 minutes. Inspectors will not have produced a written report or letter at this stage of the inspection.

If the feedback is likely to be challenging or is likely to raise sensitive issues, the inspector will be sympathetic to the implications of this feedback. The inspector will discuss with the CEO which other people should attend to ensure the necessary support is given. Attendance at the feedback meeting is voluntary and any attendee

may leave at any time.

At the feedback meeting, the lead inspector will set out the procedures for sharing the draft report/letter for any comments about the draft report, publishing the report/letter and for making a complaint. Before leaving, the lead inspector should ensure that Cafcass is clear that it has an opportunity to raise any issues or concerns or to seek clarification about the inspection, and can also contact Ofsted on the working day after the end of the inspection, if necessary.

Senior leaders may share the provisional inspection outcome and findings with whoever they deem appropriate. They may also share inspection outcomes, in confidence, with others who are not involved with Cafcass. This may include colleagues, family members, medical advisers and/or their wider support group. However, the information should not be made public.

## Inspection reports and letters

The following table sets out the kind of report we publish after each type of inspection or visit:

Type of inspection	Type of report
Inspection	Inspection report with judgements on the Ofsted 4-point scale, plus a stand-alone summary written for children
Focused visit	Letter setting out narrative findings about strengths and areas to improve
Monitoring visit	Letter setting out narrative findings about strengths and areas to improve

The lead inspector will write the inspection report/letter. The lead inspector is responsible for collating all the information into a final report following fieldwork and is accountable for its quality and integrity.

Reports/letters should:

- be concise, evaluative documents, written in clear, straightforward language and

be free of jargon

- be a fair and accurate reflection of the areas being inspected, with text, balance and tone that reflect the quality of Cafcass's practice
- be written so that they highlight good and outstanding practice and identify clear areas of strength and improvement for Cafcass
- strike a balance between being accessible to a wider audience and being of value to Cafcass
- be sufficiently clear, precise and detailed about areas that need to improve so Cafcass has a basis for subsequent action to lead to improvement

### **Sections in the report/letter**

The first page of the inspection report will include the graded judgements and a brief summary that answers these questions:

- What do we know about the overall experiences of children and families supported by Cafcass in family court proceedings?
- To what extent do leaders know about the quality of frontline practice?
- How well do they support practice to help it stay or become good?
- What has changed for children and families since the last inspection?

The report will then identify areas where improvement is needed most. The rest of the report will include a section on each of the judgement areas.

Letters following focused visits will set out the findings from the visit. The letter may identify a small number of areas where improvement is needed most in relation to the practice inspectors looked at. If inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will include a section that identifies areas for priority action. If inspectors identify an area for priority action, the letter will be subject to additional moderation. If this will affect the timeline for providing comments and publication milestones, we will write to Cafcass to confirm this.

After a monitoring visit, the inspector will write a brief report about their findings and, in particular, their evaluation of Cafcass's progress.

### **Summary for children**

After each inspection, we will provide a summary of the inspection findings for children. This will be a separate document from the main report.

We will not publish this summary. We will send it to Cafcass at the same time that we

send the pre-publication version of the main report. It will be for Cafcass to decide how best to share this summary with children.

## **Writing the report/letter**

The things that need to improve most must be proportionate to the overall grade in inspection reports and to the findings in letters. This section of the report/letter must help Cafcass fully understand the areas of the service where improvement is needed most to ensure that children receive or continue to receive a good or better service. We will set out the area of service or practice that needs to improve but will not make a recommendation as to how Cafcass should remedy this issue.

In the rest of the report/letter, inspectors will only report the main strengths and areas that need to improve. Inspection reports do not need to report on every aspect of what has been inspected. If a particular issue is not mentioned, this will be because it was neither a strength nor an area in need of improvement.

Inspectors must make clear the extent of all the issues reported. If any specific group of children is particularly affected – such as those from a specific age, community or ethnic group or disabled children – inspectors should include this in the report.

## **Clearing and publishing inspection reports and letters**

The quality assurance manager allocated to the inspection will review the report/letter and support the lead inspector throughout the report-writing process. Our National Director, Regulation and Social Care, will review reports.

After we send the draft report/letter to Cafcass, it will have 5 working days to comment on the report/letter, inspection process and findings. The draft inspection outcome and findings may be shared with whoever Cafcass deems appropriate.

We will respond to Cafcass's comments when we send the final report/letter. We will also send the report/letter to the Ministry of Justice. If Cafcass wishes to submit a formal complaint, it will have 5 working days after we send the final version of the report/letter to do so.

We will publish the final version of the report/letter on our [reports site](#) 8 working days after we send the final version to Cafcass. If Cafcass submits a complaint within the deadline set out above, we will not publish the report/letter while we consider the complaint.

<b>Quality assurance stage</b>	<b>Inspections</b>	<b>Focused and monitoring visits</b>
Draft report/letter sent to Cafcass for any comments	10 working days after inspectors complete fieldwork	5 working days after inspectors complete fieldwork
Cafcass has 5 working days to return any comments about the findings and the inspection process	11 to 15 working days after fieldwork	6 to 10 days after fieldwork
Final version of the report/letter sent to Cafcass (pre-publication, under embargo)	22 working days after fieldwork	16 days after fieldwork
Cafcass has 5 working days if it wishes to submit a complaint	23 to 27 working days after fieldwork	17 to 21 days after fieldwork
Report/letter published on Ofsted's reports website	30 working days after fieldwork	24 days after fieldwork

## **Quality assurance**

The principles of quality assurance for all inspections, focused visits and monitoring visits are based on the assumption that the lead inspector takes overall responsibility for the quality of the inspection. The lead inspector is also responsible for the final report, with each inspector being responsible for the quality of their own work.

Quality assurance arrangements will be flexible and proportionate depending on the type of inspection activity carried out. The level of quality assurance will be influenced by:

- whether it is an inspection resulting in a judgement or a visit resulting in a letter
- the experience of the team
- local intelligence held by us

# After the inspection

This section explains about submitting an action plan in response to an inspection and making a complaint to us about the inspection.

## Action plan after an inspection or visit

After an inspection, we will ask Cafcass to write an action plan that responds to the findings in the report. We will ask Cafcass to share its action plan with us by sending it to [inspectionofcafcass@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:inspectionofcafcass@ofsted.gov.uk) within 70 working days of receiving the final inspection report.

After a focused visit, we will ask Cafcass to update any existing action and/or improvement plan from the previous inspection. We will ask Cafcass to send an updated action plan to us when it shares its self-evaluation in preparation for the next annual engagement meeting.

If a visit highlights an area for priority action, we will ask Cafcass to share an updated action plan that responds to the priority action within 70 working days of receiving the final focused visit letter. We will also ask that Cafcass shares a draft of its updated action plan within 20 working days of receiving the focused visit letter.

Although there is no legal obligation to do so, we ask Cafcass for its cooperation in this, as the approach represents a proportionate means of encouraging improvement. The purpose is to provide assurance that Cafcass is taking appropriate action with urgency commensurate to the seriousness of the findings.

Cafcass does not need to submit an action plan to us after a monitoring visit.

## Conduct during inspections

Ofsted's code of conduct sets out the expectations for both inspectors and providers. Inspectors will work constructively with leaders and staff, demonstrating professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times.

# Concerns and complaints about an inspection

Most of our work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns arise during an inspection, these should be raised with the lead inspector or quality assurance manager as soon as possible during the inspection visit. This provides an opportunity to resolve the matter before the inspection is completed.

If an issue remains unresolved, Cafcass can contact the quality assurance manager on the working day after the end of an inspection. This is an opportunity to informally raise concerns about the inspection process or outcomes, ask about next steps or highlight information that they feel was not fully considered during the inspection. This will be directed to the quality assurance manager – a senior HMI who is independent of the inspection team – to try to resolve any concerns at the earliest opportunity.

If it is not possible to resolve concerns during the inspection, shortly after the inspection or through submitting comments in response to the draft report, Cafcass may wish to lodge a formal complaint when it receives the final report. The inspector will ensure that Cafcass is informed that it is able to make a formal complaint, and that [information about how to complain](#) is available on GOV.UK.

# Evaluation criteria and grade descriptors

This section sets out our description of what a good experience for children looks like. Inspectors use this to make their judgements.

## Overall effectiveness

Inspectors will determine the overall effectiveness graded judgement by taking account of the grading of the other judgements that have been agreed and by looking at:

- the extent of good practice across the service
- the extent and impact of any areas for improvement
- whether areas for improvement have been identified and the extent to which leaders and managers understand the issues and are working to resolve them



The overall judgement will be inadequate if the quality and effectiveness of either private or public law practice with children and families are inadequate.

## **The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with children and families**

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with children and families are likely to be judged as good if the following apply.

Children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted through the actions and recommendations of Cafcass.

The family court is given high-quality advice and/or recommendations about applications made to it in private law proceedings, at first and all subsequent hearings, where appropriate.

Children and their parents, carers and families are provided with appropriate information, advice and support during proceedings.

Delays are avoided in allocation, work carried out with families and filing with the court, in line with court-set hearing dates.

Effective initial risk assessments and screening of cases are carried out. Safeguarding letters are timely, proportionate, and focused on the safety and protection of children. The letters provide appropriate advice about the next steps, about the child's best interests and about the need for future Cafcass

involvement.

Effective assessment and planned direct work with children and their families/carers are carried out promptly. Children know what is happening to them and why. Individualised plans are shared with the parties, and they are proportionate and focused on the issues identified by the court.

Children who are the subject of orders of the court are seen, and seen alone, provided this is in their best interests and taking account of the complexity of the case.

Cafcass practitioners' practice in court is consistent with the Child Arrangements Programme ([Practice direction 12B – Child Arrangements Programme \(a Practice Direction made by the President of the Family Division\)](#)). It demonstrates constructive working relationships with the judiciary and court officials, and is purposeful, equitable to each party and recognises the distinct role of Cafcass within the family court.

Reports to the court, including oral reporting, include information relevant to the proceedings, appropriate analysis and recommendations. Written recommendations flow from the body of the report. They are made by Cafcass practitioners with suitable social work qualifications and experience, and by student social workers who carry out assessments under the required level of supervision.

If it is appropriate and in children's interests, and when it supports and promotes children's welfare, recommendations to court are shared with all

parties in advance of the day and this is recorded.

Case recording is coherent, timely and sufficiently comprehensive to reflect the work carried out, including the outcome of the assessment. It equitably reflects the views of parties and children.

Information-sharing between agencies and professionals is lawful, timely, specific and effective.

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with children and families are likely to be judged outstanding if they meet the criteria for good and the following applies.

Practice is consistently good or better so that the court is given the best possible advice to inform about the decision-making for children. Evidence-based informed practice, some of which will be innovative, continues to develop from a strong and confident base, making an exceptional difference at a local and national level to children's experiences.

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with children and families are likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if the following applies.

'Good' private law practice is not sufficiently in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures or unnecessary delays attributable to Cafcass that result in children's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with children and

families are likely to be judged inadequate if the following applies.

There are widespread or serious failures, including unnecessary delays in identifying solutions that are most likely to be sustainable for children, which result in children's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

## **The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with children and families**

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with children and families are likely to be judged good if the following apply.

Children's welfare is safeguarded and is promoted through the actions and recommendations of children's guardians.

Children's best interests remain central to the proceedings.

Children's guardians give the family court high-quality advice on any application made to it in public law proceedings – at the first case management hearing and subsequent hearings – where the guardian's advice is required by the court.

Children are appropriately represented in family proceedings or, if appropriate, enabled to instruct their own legal representative.

Children and their parents, carers and families are provided with appropriate information, advice and other support during proceedings.

Cafcass does not contribute to avoidable delays. It challenges other agencies when delays are identified.

Cafcass involves independent reviewing officers regularly to improve the plans for children and ensure that children's needs and wishes have been properly understood.

When children's guardians are involved in local authority pre-proceedings work, they provide appropriate advice and monitoring.

Children's guardians quickly establish an understanding of the child's needs, wishes and feelings. They provide the court with analysis of the child's lived experiences early and throughout the proceedings. Children are supported to understand what is happening to them and why.

Effective assessment and planned direct work with children and their families/carers are carried out. This adds value to the work of the local authority and the courts.

There are effective working relationships between children's guardians and

social workers and all parties.

Children who are the subject of care and supervision proceedings are seen alone by their children's guardian, proportionate to the needs and complexity of the case (if the child is not seen, the reasons are recorded). Children's guardians build effective engagement with the child in accordance with Cafcass's functions and duties.

Cafcass practitioners' practice in court is consistent with the Public Law Outline (practice direction issued by the President of the Family Division regarding care and supervision proceedings under [Part 4 of the Children Act 1989](#)), demonstrates constructive working relationships with the judiciary and court officials and is purposeful and equitable to all parties.

Reports to the court, including oral reporting, include information that is relevant to the proceedings and contain appropriate analysis and recommendations. Written recommendations flow from the body of the report and are made by children's guardians who are skilled and suitably qualified in social work.

The recommendations and advice of children's guardians in care, supervision and secure proceedings add value to the work of the local authority and other expert advice to the court. Expert advice from children's guardians reduces the need for appointments of further experts.

Case recording is coherent, timely, sufficiently comprehensive to reflect the work carried out and the outcome of the assessment, and balanced and fair

to the adult parties.

Information-sharing between agencies and professionals is lawful, timely, specific and effective.

Children's guardians liaise and work effectively throughout proceedings with independent reviewing officers and provide a handover at the end of proceedings to ensure continuity of challenge to the local authority's future planning for children.

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with children and families are likely to be judged outstanding if the following applies.

The response to the needs of children and families involved in public law proceedings and the quality of advice to the family court is consistently good or better and consistently ensures that the court is given the best possible advice to inform decision-making for children. Evidence-based practice, some of which will be innovative, continues to develop from a strong and confident base, making an exceptional difference at a local and national level to children's experiences.

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with children and families are likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if the following applies.

'Good' public law practice is not sufficiently in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures or unnecessary delays attributable to Cafcass that result in children's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with children and families are likely to be judged inadequate if the following applies.

There are widespread or serious failures, including unnecessary delays that are attributable to Cafcass, in identifying plans for children and that result in children's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

## **The impact of leaders on private and public law practice with children and families**

The impact of leaders on private and public law practice with children and families is likely to be judged good if the following apply.

### **Accountability and governance**

Leaders at all levels prioritise, identify and implement ambitious strategies to provide family court social work services that influence and respond to the national policy agenda, and to drive improvement in practice.

Leaders use their influence externally to effectively promote the best interests of children in the national family justice system, including tackling delays in making permanent arrangements for children.

The Cafcass Board provides effective strategic leadership, which delivers a clear vision that informs the organisation's strategic direction and priorities and holds the organisation to account.



Cafcass senior and local leaders implement policy that maintains the best interests of children and the 'paramountcy principle' while ensuring that there is an appropriate relationship between demand, resources, performance and quality. They exercise effective management oversight and are effective in tackling weaknesses and overcoming barriers to improvement.

Leaders demonstrate that there are clear lines of accountability between local delivery and the national organisation.

Leaders are proactive and engaged effectively with all relevant partnership organisations, including the family court, judiciary at all levels, local authorities, groups that represent child and adult Cafcass users, local safeguarding partnership arrangements and local and national family justice boards.

There is an effective response to equality issues such as race, religion and belief, sex, age, sexual orientation and disability, both in terms of the workforce and in how Cafcass fulfils its statutory functions, including the public sector equality duty.

Commissioning of services is intelligence-based, is supported by robust needs assessments, is monitored effectively and provides services that local courts consistently use to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are the subject of family proceedings.

## **Learning culture**

Staff at all levels work in a culture that is challenging as well as supportive and that supports improvement, safeguards the welfare of children and promotes diversity and inclusion.

Cafcass responds appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies and new demands, and is resilient when presented with new challenges. The organisation's self-evaluation of practice is accurate.

Cafcass can demonstrate evidence of practice that is informed and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence about the quality of services. Cafcass learns from children's and families' complaints and feedback.

## **Performance management**

Performance management supports improvement of the quality of practice across the organisation, including the quality assurance of reports to the court. Delays for children are regularly reviewed and action taken when it is needed.

Cafcass's performance targets are child-focused and stretch the organisation's performance, rate of continuous improvement and delivery of services to children. Leaders identify and address negative trends in performance and sustain improvement. The organisation successfully addresses performance issues and/or there is evidence of significant improvement in performance and quality in the short term. There is demonstrable capacity to sustain this improvement.

Staff are suitably skilled, trained effectively and supervised, and the quality of their practice improves. Management oversight of practice, including senior managers' scrutiny of practice, is established, systematic, used to improve the quality of assessment and advice to the courts, and effective in tackling weaknesses and overcoming barriers to improvement.

## Workforce

Organisational development and the national improvement service (which supports practice improvement through a team of improvement managers) provide a sufficient, skilled, diverse and suitably experienced workforce able to respond to the demands placed on Cafcass.

There is strong leadership on issues of race, religion and belief, sex, age, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, marriage, gender reassignment and disability, both in terms of the workforce and how Cafcass fulfils its statutory functions, including the public sector equality duty.

Cafcass's practice is timely, proportionate to need, fair, balanced and delivered in accordance with [professional social work standards](#).

The impact of leaders on private and public law practice with children and families is likely to be judged outstanding if the following applies.

In addition to meeting the requirements of a 'good' judgement, there is evidence that leaders and managers are confident, ambitious and influential

in changing the lives of children in family proceedings. They innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services for children and families. They know their strengths and weaknesses well and both respond to and are resilient to new challenges. Professional relationships between Cafcass and its partner organisations are mature and well developed. Accountabilities are embedded and result in confident, regular evaluation and improvement in the quality of advice given to the family courts.

The impact of leaders on private and public law practice with children and families is likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if the following applies.

Any widespread or serious failures have been identified by Cafcass and are being addressed effectively, but the characteristics of good leadership are not consistently in place.

The impact of leaders on private and public law practice with children and families is likely to be judged inadequate if the following applies.

Either of the 2 practice judgements is inadequate and leaders and managers have not been able to demonstrate sufficient understanding of the failure. Leaders and managers have been ineffective in prioritising challenging weak practice and making improvements.

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