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Guidance

Social care common inspection framework (SCCIF): secure children's homes

Updated 5 April 2024

Applies to England

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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
- 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.

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, 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 children's lives
- 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 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

When applying this guidance, inspectors will take appropriate action to comply with Ofsted's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

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 secure children's homes look at children's education and learning, and children's health. The judgement for overall progress and experiences of children takes these judgements into account.

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, 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 of the care and support provided and their impact 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 inspectors judge 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, including benchmarks of what good looks like.

The overall experiences and progress of children

Areas of required evidence are:

- the quality of individualised care and support provided, and the impact of the home on children's experiences and on the progress they make in relation to their individual starting points
- the quality of relationships between professionals and children and parents
- the extent to which staff are sensitive to the impact of living in a secure environment for children
- how well children's views are understood and taken into account, and how their rights and entitlements are met
- the quality of children's experiences on a day-to-day basis
- how well the home ensures that the needs of children who live far from their home area are met
- the timeliness and quality of the home's initial assessment of children's starting points in education and their learning needs
- the quality of education provided, its impact on children's learning and the progress they make from their starting points
- how well children learn
- the effectiveness of support to children with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the extent to which teaching staff actively promote equality, tolerance and diversity
- whether children have good access to the health services that they need, at the intensity required and for as long as it is required
- the progress children make in relation to their physical, emotional and mental health
- how well children are prepared for their futures and how well transitions are managed

Good

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

Children are enabled to build trusted and secure relationships with adults who are looking after them. Staff know the children well, listen to them, invest time in them, protect them and promote their welfare. Children are able to develop an appropriate sense of permanence and belonging. They make progress and have a range of positive experiences.

Staff understand children's preferred methods of communication, and consistently support and promote these methods so that children can participate fully in their daily lives.

Children, including those who communicate non-verbally, are supported to actively participate in day-to-day and more complex decisions about their lives, as appropriate. They are sensitively helped to understand when it may not be possible to act on their wishes and why other action is taken that is in their best interests. Children have access to, and are actively encouraged to involve, a suitably skilled and experienced independent advocate and, where appropriate, an independent visitor.

Children know how to complain. The setting's complaints policy is easy to understand, accessible, including for children who use alternative communication systems, and child-focused. Children 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 practice and services improve accordingly.

Children enjoy access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities, including activities in the local community when their plan provides for this, irrespective of any disability they may have. They are supported to engage in faith-based activities if they wish.

Children are supported to develop their independence according to their individual needs, while protecting themselves from being in unsafe situations or with unsafe people. The home works effectively with relevant agencies when planning for children's discharges from the home.

Authorised visits out of the home are used effectively and appropriately to help prepare

children for transitions or for their return to the community.

Specialist help is made available according to the individual needs of children, including those who live away from their 'home' authority. The help is available, as soon as it is needed, at the intensity required and for as long as it is required. When services are not available, or children are waiting for a long time for help, the home is proactive in challenging and escalating concerns with the placing authority and/or other partners.

Any specific type or model of care delivered or commissioned by the home is provided by staff who are suitably trained, experienced, qualified and supervised. There is evidence of benefits to children and the care is reviewed regularly.

Children who are new to the home are welcomed sensitively and with careful and considered planning. The planning for children's successful transitions or return to the community begins at the point of their admission. The home actively challenges the responsible authorities when staff have concerns about any aspect of the future plans for children. When children leave the home, staff promote positive endings and help with building their 'life story'. When endings are unplanned, then the welfare and well-being of children remain paramount and staff act at all times with this in mind. The needs and feelings of other children living in the home are taken into account.

Children are helped 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.

Children are treated with dignity and respect. They experience care 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. The impact upon children of living in a secure environment is well understood and as a result, the care and help assist them to develop a positive self-view and to increase their ability to form and sustain attachments and build emotional resilience and a sense of their own identity. The care and help also assist them to overcome any previous experiences of neglect and trauma.

Staff always place the well-being of individual children at the centre of their practice. All

their achievements are celebrated and appropriately rewarded. Their day-to-day needs are met, such as routine, privacy, personal space, nutritious meals and enjoyable mealtimes.

Children have appropriate, carefully assessed, supported contact (direct and/or indirect) with their family, friends and other people who are important to them, such as previous carers. There are no unnecessary restrictions in place. Staff work proactively and positively with parents and former carers to promote meaningful and safe contact and continuity of care, where appropriate.

Requires improvement to be good

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

The secure children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children so that they receive positive experiences and make good progress. However, there are no serious and/or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate

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

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children are not protected or that result in children's welfare not being promoted or safeguarded. Their care and experiences are poor and they are not making, or not likely to make, progress.

Outstanding

The experiences and progress of children 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 work to prepare children for leaving the centre, consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children, even when they have complex or challenging needs. There are examples of excellent practice that are worthy of wider dissemination.

There is significant evidence of change and improvement because of the excellent quality of care provided. The progress of children is exceptional, taking into account their starting points.

The experience of living in the home enhances children's life chances. For children with the most complex needs, staff are able to evidence the sustained benefit to the lives of children in their care.

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

Children's education and learning experience

In making this judgement, the principles of the SCCIF, and specifically those in the case-tracking section of this guidance, apply.

The following education evaluation criteria are specific to secure children's homes and underpinned by the principles set out in the [education inspection framework](#). We think these principles are relevant wherever children receive their education.

For additional information, secure children's homes can refer to the [education inspection framework](#) and [inspecting education, skills and work activities in prisons and young offender institutions](#).

Good

The quality of children's education and learning experiences is likely to be judged good if there is evidence of the following:

Children have access to a well-designed, planned and sequenced curriculum. This embodies the decisions that leaders, managers and teaching staff have made about the knowledge, skills and behaviours that the children need to fulfil their aspirations for learning, employment and independence. This includes English (in particular, reading) and mathematics.

Teachers teach the curriculum well. They help children to embed key concepts in their long-term memory and apply them fluently and consistently. They use accurate and effective initial and regular assessment to check understanding and inform learning to ensure that children use knowledge fluently.

Teachers involve children sensitively and appropriately in the planning of their individual learning programmes. They provide regular and clear feedback to children on their educational progress, which supports them effectively to achieve their learning goals.

Teaching staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to work effectively and sensitively with children who have complex and wide-ranging needs. They are confident in an environment where individual children may be angry or traumatised and where group dynamics can require careful and sensitive intervention.

Teaching staff liaise regularly and effectively with relevant professionals and with children's parents/carers, as appropriate. They understand, and take account of, wider plans for children and any other factors in children's lives that may have an impact on their learning.

Children develop positive relationships with staff that help to build their resilience and helps them to engage fully and actively in learning.

Children develop detailed knowledge across the curriculum and, as a result, achieve well across all areas of their study. They make substantial and sustained progress from their identified starting points, with staff taking into account any specific needs identified in children's plans.

Children are well prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment at each stage of their learning. They advance to their next steps in terms of qualifications and other achievements in a timely and effective way. They are progressing to appropriate educational and employment destinations.

Children value their education. They participate enthusiastically in education and related learning activities. No groups of children are disadvantaged by low attendance.

Children receive help and support from teachers to manage their behaviour and feelings safely. Teachers understand children's experiences, respond with appropriate boundaries about what is safe and acceptable for each child and seek to understand the triggers for behaviour. Teachers prevent and tackle bullying. Learning sessions flow smoothly without unnecessary interruption. Children show respect for others' ideas and views.

Children are helped to develop personal skills that promote their independent living skills, increase their employability and prepare them to contribute positively to wider society.

Teaching staff ensure that children's educational needs are addressed effectively in transition planning. High-quality, impartial careers guidance helps children prepare for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

Requires improvement to be good

The quality of children's education and their learning experiences is likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if there is evidence of the following:

Children's education and learning experiences are not yet good, considering their starting points.

Inadequate

The quality of children's education and their learning experiences is likely to be judged inadequate if there is evidence of the following:

Children's education and learning experiences are consistently poor and they are not making, or are not likely to make, sufficient progress, taking into account their starting points.

Outstanding

The quality of children's education and their learning experiences is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a good judgement consistently, there is evidence of the following:

Children are making, or are likely to make, exceptional progress, taking into account their starting points.

Children's health

In making this judgement, the principles of the SCCIF, and specifically those in the case tracking section of this guidance, apply.

Children's health is likely to be judged good if there is evidence of the following:

Good

Children are in good health or are being helped to improve their health or to manage lifelong conditions, taking into account any risks to the child. Their individual health needs (including their oral, physical, mental, emotional and sexual health needs, as appropriate) are promptly assessed, planned for, accurately recorded and met by in-house or local health services, including dentists, in a timely way. All staff involved with the child work together to promote good health, effective multi-disciplinary working and to manage risk.

Commissioners and health providers ensure the provision of appropriate and high-quality healthcare for children in secure settings, delivered by suitably skilled and experienced staff.

Children receive good continuity of care and treatment, through effective arrangements with external health providers and other agencies throughout their time at the home and after they leave. When services are not available, or children are waiting for a long time for help, the home is proactive in challenging and escalating concerns.

The physical, emotional and mental health of children is actively and effectively promoted during their time in the home, leading to clear improved health outcomes. Health improvement and healthy lifestyle choices are supported by a whole-home approach, informed by national health promotion initiatives that are based on the health needs of the current population. Children are encouraged to enjoy regular exercise and a balanced diet.

Arrangements for managing medication or children's complex health needs are safe and effective. Where appropriate, children are enabled to manage their prescribed medication

independently in preparation for leaving the home. This is supported by an up-to-date risk assessment to ensure their safety, and that of others.

Pregnant young women and their babies are fully supported and provided with a safe and comfortable environment. Their health and well-being are maintained or improved by staff who are suitably skilled to deliver appropriate care to both mother and baby and promote the baby's development.

Good health outcomes are achieved, driven by, and monitored against, a comprehensive, up-to-date health strategy and policies and procedures. These promote improved practice and cover:

- physical health, substance misuse, emotional and mental health
- early identification and response to risk of self-harm and suicide ideation
- medicine management
- communicable disease
- infection control
- safeguarding
- information-sharing
- emergency plans

Health services provided in the home meet the Care Quality Commission (CQC) regulations and, as a minimum, current healthcare standards for children in secure settings.

Requires improvement to be good

Children's health is likely to be judged requires improvement to be good if there is evidence of the following:

Healthcare does not yet meet the standard of good, although the shortfalls in meeting children's physical, emotional and/or mental health needs are not serious and/or widespread.

Inadequate

Children's health is likely to be judged inadequate if there is evidence of the following:

Healthcare is consistently poor. There are serious and/or widespread shortfalls in meeting children's physical, emotional and/or mental health needs.

Outstanding

Children's health is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a good judgement, there is evidence of the following:

Healthcare consistently exceeds the standard of good.

Children's health shows exceptional progress, taking into account their starting points.

How well children are helped and protected

Areas of required evidence are:

- how well risks are identified, understood and managed, and whether the support and care provided help children to become increasingly safe, taking account of their individual circumstances and previous experiences
- the provider's actions in response to children who have absconded or may be at risk of harm, including from exploitation, neglect, abuse, self-harm, bullying and radicalisation
- how well staff and carers manage situations and behaviour and whether clear and consistent boundaries contribute to a feeling of well-being and security for children
- how the use of restraint, single separation and searches of children are managed and minimised
- whether safeguarding arrangements to protect children meet all statutory and other government requirements, promote their welfare and prevent radicalisation and extremism

Good

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

Children feel protected and are protected from harm, including neglect, abuse, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, accidents, self-harm, bullying and radicalisation. There is a strong and proactive response from all those working with children that reduces actual harm or the risk of harm to them, including from self-harm. That response includes regular

and effective contact and planning with the child's allocated social worker, youth offending worker and the child's family, if this is appropriate and in accordance with plans for their future. The use of closed-circuit television and body-worn cameras effectively promotes children's safety.

Children can identify a trusted adult they can talk to about any concerns. They report that adults listen to them, take their concerns seriously and respond appropriately.

Any risks associated with children offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, self-harming, absconding, being affiliated with gangs or being sexually or criminally exploited are known and understood by the adults who look after them. Individual up-to-date risk assessments effectively address any known vulnerabilities for each child and set out what action staff should take to manage the risks. There are plans and help in place to reduce actual harm or the risk of harm and there is evidence that these risks are reducing or managed well, based on children's individual circumstances.

Children who abscond experience well-coordinated responses that reduce actual 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 further harm or the risk of harm.

The home is aware of, and implements in full, the requirements of the statutory guidance for children who are missing. It challenges the local authority if the local authority does not offer or arrange an independent return home interview. The home takes appropriate steps to escalate concerns. Parents and carers are made aware of incidents when the child has absconded, when this is appropriate and relevant to the plans for that child's future care. Staff look for children when they have absconded.

Children are supported to take risks appropriate to their age or level of understanding as part of their development of independent living skills and are encouraged to learn from any incidents when things don't go to plan.

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

Children receive help and support to manage their behaviour and feelings safely. Staff understand children's experiences, respond with appropriate boundaries about what is safe and acceptable for each child and seek to understand the triggers for behaviour.

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

Restraint, restrictive practice, single separation and managing children away from others are used only when necessary to protect the child and/or those around them and must be proportionate. All incidents are recorded, reviewed, and monitored by leaders. The views of the child, dependent on their age and understanding, are sought and understood.

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

Proactive and effective working relationships with the police help to support and protect children. Staff work with the police to protect the children living in the home from any unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice system.

Staff understand the risks that using the internet may pose for children, such as bullying, sexual and criminal exploitation and radicalisation. They have well-developed strategies in place to keep children safe and to support them in learning how to keep themselves safe.

Any searches of children or their rooms and possessions are carried out sensitively by appropriately trained staff with due consideration given to the children's need to feel safe and to have their dignity and needs respected. All searches are appropriately recorded, including the reasons for the search, efforts to seek the child's consent, any risk assessment and management oversight of the decision to carry out a search.

Careful recruitment and regular monitoring of staff and volunteers prevent unsuitable people from being recruited and having the opportunity to harm children or to place them at

risk. The relevant authorities and professional bodies are informed of any concerns about inappropriate adults.

Staff working within the home are clear about, and follow, procedures for responding to concerns about the safety of a child. Any child protection concerns are immediately shared with the placing and/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 from further harm. If the home is not satisfied with the response from either the local authority where the home 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 child.

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 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 home has effective links with local authorities, designated officers and other important safeguarding agencies. There is good communication about safeguarding issues, such as any injuries sustained during restraints or allegations against staff.

The home has good relationships with relevant local voluntary sector organisations that may be able to offer specialist support to children in keeping themselves safe.

The physical environment for children is safe and secure and protects them from harm or the risk of harm. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and staff understand and implement strategies to keep children safe.

Effective contingency plans are in place for emergencies and serious incidents to ensure the safety of children, staff and visitors. Plans are regularly tested and reviewed, and any learning identified and actioned. All staff are confident in fulfilling their responsibilities set out in these plans.

Requires improvement to be good

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

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

Inadequate

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

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

Outstanding

The help and protection offered to children 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 lives of children. Highly effective planning manages and minimises risks inside and outside of the home. When children are new to the home, any risks are well understood and are significantly reducing. Proactive and creative safeguarding practice means that all children, including the most vulnerable, have a strong sense of safety and well-being. Children 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 lives and experiences of children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Areas of required evidence are:

- whether leaders and managers show an ambitious vision, have high expectations for what all children can achieve and ensure high standards of individualised care, health and education

- whether leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the experiences that lead to the progress children are making in respect of the plan for them and take effective action when necessary
- whether leaders and managers provide the right supportive environment for all staff through effective supervision and appraisal and high-quality induction and training programmes that are tailored to the specific needs of the children
- how well leaders and managers evaluate and promote the quality of education through performance management and appropriate professional development
- how well leaders and managers know and understand the home's strengths and weaknesses, prevent shortfalls, identify weaknesses and take decisive and effective action
- whether the home is achieving its stated aims and objectives
- the quality of professional relationships to ensure the best possible all-round support to children 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
- the impact of children's views and participation
- a clear and deliverable contingency plan setting out how the provider will address staff vacancies, including any change of registered manager

Good

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

The home is effectively and efficiently managed by a permanent, suitably experienced and qualified registered manager. Urgent action is taken to address any vacancy of the registered manager post.

The home is properly staffed and resourced to meet the needs of the children. Staff are suitably vetted and qualified and are able to deliver high-quality services to children and their families. Arrangements for recruitment and appraisals are robust and include children as appropriate.

Leaders and managers actively and regularly monitor the quality of care provided. Those employed to carry out external monitoring have the necessary skills and experience.

Leaders and managers use learning from practice and feedback to improve the experiences and care of children, including, for example, direct testimony from children,

parents, carers, other professionals and other stakeholders. They learn from 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 of children.

Action is taken to address all issues of concern, including any concerns or complaints from children and local residents. Proper investigations are carried out. Placing and host authorities and youth offending services are engaged as necessary. Effective action has been taken to address all requirements and recommendations from previous inspections.

Leaders and managers ensure that plans for individual children comprehensively identify their needs. Plans take into account the local authority care plan for each child.

Leaders and staff work proactively and positively with other agencies and professionals. They seek to build effective working relationships with parents and social workers from placing authorities, youth offending services and with the local authority where they are located to secure positive outcomes for children.

Leaders and staff work proactively with the local community, including neighbours, faith groups, leisure organisations and local businesses, to support children to use the facilities when their plan provides for this, and to develop a sense of belonging, security and purpose.

If children are not settling into the home, leaders and managers take steps to ensure that the plan is reviewed with the placing authority and/or youth offending services and the family, as 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 plans for the children and drive the achievement of important milestones, goals and permanence for their futures. In education, this includes English, in particular reading, and mathematics. Leaders and managers monitor the progress that individual children make and can demonstrate the positive impact that living at the home has had on individual children's progress and life chances.

Managers and staff receive regular and effective supervision that is focused on children's experiences, needs, plans and feedback. Supervision is recorded effectively.

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

Training, development and induction activities are effective. They are focused on ensuring that staff can meet the specific needs of the children who they are responsible for. 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.

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 children coming to live at the home and ensure that staff have the skills to meet their needs as known at the time of admission. Planning takes into account the needs of the children already living in the home.

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

The manager and responsible individual ensure that the physical environment is safe, secure and maintained to a high standard. It meets the needs of the children and feels and looks like a family home for children taking into account the secure nature of the home. Any damage or wear and tear is quickly and regularly repaired.

The registered provider is financially viable and can deliver high-quality, stable care for children.

Case records reflect children's everyday lives and the work that is carried out with them. They reflect their achievements and clearly relate to the plans for their futures. The style and clarity of records increases the understanding that children have about their histories, background and experiences. The records are available to children who are able to see or contribute to them as they wish, with appropriate support.

Volunteers who work with children living in the home are trained, supervised and supported to carry out their roles appropriately and to provide a high-quality service that enhances the experiences of children.

The registered person ensures that notifications of all significant events that relate to the welfare and protection of children living in the home 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 home is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all children. Staff have confidence in managers when reporting and addressing safeguarding matters. The ethos and objectives of the home 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. Where there are weaknesses in practice, 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.

Inadequate

The effectiveness of leaders and managers will be judged inadequate if there is evidence of the following:

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

The home fails to work effectively in partnership with others in the best interests of children.

The failure to appoint a manager after 26 weeks where there is no or limited evidence of attempts to recruit/appoint, will usually lead to an inadequate judgement for leadership but never more than requires improvement. Also, the overall judgement is unlikely to be better than good.

If a manager fails to apply to be registered, once appointed for more than 12 weeks, then the judgement for leadership and management will usually be inadequate.

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 and ambitious for children and influential in changing the lives of those in their care.

Leaders and managers create a culture of high aspiration and positivity and they have high expectations of their staff to change and improve the lives of the children they are responsible for. They lead by example, innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest quality care for children.

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

Leaders and managers have working relationships with partner agencies that ensure the best possible care, experiences and futures for children.

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 His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is the registration authority for children's homes and other establishments and agencies to which Part 2 of the Act applies.

The Care Standards Act 2000 sets out Ofsted's powers to regulate, inspect and enforce compliance with the Act and relevant regulations. The Act also defines a children's home (section 1).

A secure children's home is a children's home within the definition in section 1 of the Act that is also authorised by the Secretary of State under regulation 3(1) of the Children (Secure Accommodation) Regulations 1991 as a secure children's home.

When inspecting secure children's homes, Ofsted considers the knowledge and understanding gained from previous inspections, and:

- the [Care Standards Act 2000](#)
- the [Children \(Secure Accommodation\) Regulations 1991](#)
- the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)
- the [Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards](#)
- [health care standards for children and young people in secure settings](#)
- [Building bridges: a positive behaviour framework for the children and young people secure estate](#)
- for children placed in secure children's homes on justice grounds, the [Standards for children in the youth justice system](#)
- other statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE)

For full inspections, Ofsted will be assisted by an inspector from the CQC in Ofsted's evaluation of health services provided for children (authorised by HMCI under section 31 of the Act). For assurance or monitoring inspections, Ofsted may request the assistance of a CQC inspector, if there are health-related matters and the inspection would benefit from the CQC's input.

When inspecting secure children's homes, the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) is taken into account.

The [Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading](#)

[Treatment \(OPCAT\)](#) requires that all places of detention are visited regularly by independent bodies, known as the [National Preventive Mechanism \(NPM\)](#), which monitors the treatment of and conditions for detainees. Inspections of places where children are deprived of their liberty carried out by Ofsted contribute to the UK's response to its international obligations under OPCAT.

The CQC is responsible for regulating registered healthcare providers. If providers fail to meet health care requirements, the CQC can take enforcement action against the identified healthcare provider under [The Health and Social Care Act 2008 \(Regulated Activities\) Regulations 2014](#).

Inspectors take into account the [CQC \(Registration\) Regulations 2009](#).

The regulations, the government guide and the SCCIF

Secure children's homes must meet the statutory requirements of the regulations. When they do not, inspectors identify clearly what they must do in the form of setting requirements or through enforcement action.

The DfE has published the [Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards](#) (the Guide), which explains and supplements the regulations. Registered persons must have regard to the Guide in interpreting and meeting the regulations. If providers do not take account of the Guide, this may indicate a failure to meet the regulations.

Inspectors consider:

- the impact on children
- 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 requires improvement to be good judgement. Requirements may still be made when providers are judged to be good.

In addition to the quality standards, there are management and administrative regulations that we also take into account when making judgements, taking statutory enforcement action and setting requirements: the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#).

We use recommendations to indicate where practice can improve. These are always related to the Guide.

Secure children's homes must also comply with mandatory measures imposed by criminal justice legislation, such as sentence planning requirements for children under the supervision of youth justice services. They may also have additional conditions imposed by the DfE as part of their approval as a secure home.

Types of inspection

We carry out 3 different types of inspection of secure children's homes, as described below.

Full inspections

A full inspection is carried out usually at least once annually. We inspect against the evaluation criteria and this results in a set of graded judgements. Inspectors will normally be on site for up to 3 days.

Assurance inspections

An assurance inspection is carried out for secure children's homes annually to provide assurance that the home has not declined since the full inspection. See ['Frequency of inspections'](#) for more information. We will look for evidence that; Children are safe and well cared for, and leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

We will make a single judgement based on the findings of the inspection. This will be either:

- the setting has serious or widespread concerns, or
- the setting does not have serious or widespread concerns

Inspectors will normally be on site for one day.

Monitoring inspections

If there is an incident, or if we receive a complaint or are concerned about a secure children's home, we may carry out a monitoring inspection.

We may also carry out monitoring inspections to:

- monitor specific issues or compliance with a notice
- review any building work, to ensure that the design and layout remains suitable for achieving the aims and objectives set out in the home's statement of purpose
- gather information on a particular aspect of care or service provision

Notice of inspection

All inspections of secure children's homes are unannounced.

We ask homes to give inspectors access to premises and records and space for inspectors to work. Inspectors may need some help to navigate the system if records are electronic and, where relevant, request that the registered person, or person in charge of the home, seeks urgent access for inspectors to the [Youth Justice Application Framework](#).

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

Request for information at an inspection

At the start of inspection, inspectors give the provider a copy of [Annex A](#) of the inspection framework and agree when the information should be made available. Providers should send a copy of the completed Annex A to the inspector electronically.

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

Providers can download a copy and keep this updated ready for their full inspection. Some of the information is stored by Ofsted for data analysis purposes (see ['Use of personal data'](#)).

Inspectors use Annex A data to generate lines of enquiry about the safety and welfare of children. Specifically, inspectors want to assure themselves that:

- when children are considered to be at risk of, or subject to, child sexual exploitation or extremism, all agencies including the relevant local authorities are working together to support the child
- when children are separated from others, or locked into their bedrooms outside of normal bedtime routines, that the legal criteria are adhered to and there is robust oversight and governance by managers
- return home interviews are being offered when children have absconded from the home
- children are receiving the educational provision as outlined in their relevant plan
- children are receiving appropriate healthcare
- there are plans in place to ensure that staff have an appropriate qualification in order to meet [regulation 32 of the Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)

If the inspector finds that the information provided by the manager in Annex A conflicts with evidence gathered during the inspection, and these are significant or inaccurate, they should advise the manager of this. This may inform the inspector's evaluation of leadership and practice. The inspector will request an updated version of the Annex A to be emailed to them. Once received, both the earlier and updated versions of the Annex A should be uploaded as part of the evidence base, and the updated (corrected) version entered onto the inspection system.

If a placing authority or other agency has not fulfilled its statutory duties or met the child's needs as identified in their care plan, inspectors should evaluate the action the manager has taken. Inspectors must inform the relevant Senior His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) of any placing authorities that have not arranged a return home interview for any child who has absconded from the home or of any concerns they have that a local authority is not meeting its statutory duties.

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

Scheduling and the inspection team

Who makes up the team

Secure children's homes are inspected by a national team of inspectors. Inspections are usually carried out by 3 Ofsted social care inspectors, an inspector from the CQC and one of the further education and skills HMI.

Frequency of inspections

We have a duty to inspect secure children's homes as set out in [Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills \(Fees and Frequency of Inspections\) \(Children's Homes, etc.\) Regulations 2015](#) as amended.

We inspect all secure children's homes at least twice in the year-long cycle from 1 April to 31 March.

Different patterns of inspection may occur if a home has been judged inadequate or if a home is not operating at the time of inspection.

If a home is judged to have serious or widespread concerns at an assurance inspection after being judged outstanding or good at a full inspection, we then decide when to inspect it again (see ['Inadequate judgements: next steps'](#) for more information).

Scheduling

The scheduling of inspections takes account of:

- legal requirements
- previous inspection findings
- complaints and concerns about the service
- questionnaire responses from children, social workers and other stakeholders
- when the home has a contract with the Youth Custody Service (YCS)

- any information provided to Ofsted by the YCS
- information provided to Ofsted by the DfE
- notifications
- monitoring reports given to Ofsted by children's homes under regulations 44 and 45 of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)

If possible, the same inspectors will not inspect a home for more than 3 consecutive full 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, inspectors usually spend a maximum of 3 days on site.

For assurance inspections, 2 social care inspectors are usually on site for a maximum of 1 day. Ofsted may also request the assistance of a CQC inspector or a further education and skills inspector, if there are health or education related matters and the inspection would benefit from their input.

Inspectors determine the time spent on site and size of the team is by considering:

- the complexity of the environment and the size of secure children's homes means that movement around buildings takes significantly more time than other provisions; at times, movements can be restricted, limiting inspector activity assessing specific factors, such as: safety and security systems; management of keys and locks, and the secure perimeter, including gates and fences; assessing the effective use of technologies, such as smart glass, key fob registering, media panels and anti-ligature design; the storage, maintenance and use of ligature knives/cutters; the management of movement around the building and outside the secure perimeter, including escort arrangements
- the evaluation of a range of health services commissioned by NHS England
- the evaluation of education provision with dedicated teaching staff and facilities
- the unique security requirements and factors of each secure children's home
- accessing the Youth Justice Application Framework to assess plans for the safety and care of children who are remanded or sentenced
- limited opportunities to talk with children alone (should they wish)
- the need to find opportunities to talk to staff who are in direct supervision of children at all times

Deferrals

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 provider may request a deferral of an inspection at the earliest opportunity. We will decide whether to grant a deferral in line with

our [deferral policy](#). We make these decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Timeframe

Day	Full inspection activity
1	Preparation
2	Site visit
3	Site visit
4	Site visit
5	Lead inspector, the CQC and further education and skills HMI – report writing
6	Lead inspector collates and finalises the report
7 to 10	Inspection evidence and report submitted for quality assurance
22	Draft report sent to the registered provider within 18 working days from the end of the inspection. The provider then has up to 5 working days to send in comments on the draft report or submit a formal complaint
27	Provider returns the report with comments or submits a formal complaint within 5 working days
34	Final report sent to the registered provider within 30 working days of the end of the inspection (longer if there has been a complaint)
39	The final report will be published on the Ofsted reports website 5 days after it is sent to the provider

Figure 1: Ofsted's post-inspection and complaints procedure



[View this information in an accessible format.](#)

Preparing for an inspection

Analysis and planning

Pre-inspection analysis and planning are important parts of all SCCIF inspections. Inspectors are allocated one day to prepare for a full inspection. Lead inspectors are allocated half a day to prepare for an assurance inspection. They should use this time to review the information held by Ofsted and to ensure that the fieldwork is properly focused and used to best effect in collecting first-hand evidence.

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

- previous inspection reports
- completed questionnaires from children, parents and stakeholders and associated summary reports
- the home's statement of purpose and children's guide
- any concerns and complaints received
- notifications of serious events
- reports of monthly visits received under regulation 44
- quality assurance reports received under regulation 45 (including monitoring by the registered person of any incident when a child accommodated in the home has absconded or is at risk of, or subject to, child sexual exploitation)
- any changes to registration, including change of manager or the responsible individual
- any enforcement activity within the last inspection year

The lead inspector will contact the YCS (where relevant) requesting any relevant information to inform inspection lines of enquiry.

In addition, the lead inspector should always familiarise themselves with relevant background and contextual information, such as the most recent inspection of the local authority, any linked setting and review of the local safeguarding children board/partners, where the home is situated. Review of the most recent annual report of the local safeguarding children board/partners should consider the assessment of the use of restraint as set out in [Working together to safeguard children 2018](#).

If we have received information that indicates potential non-compliance with regulatory requirements, we may use this information as a line of enquiry during a full or monitoring inspection. The lead inspector usually outlines the concern to the registered person(s) or person in charge of the home at the time 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 lead inspector carries out an analysis of the available evidence and information and formulates this into a pre-inspection briefing that is provided to all inspection team members. Inspectors must add the pre-inspection briefing to the inspection database.

The pre-inspection briefing for the inspection sets out:

inspectors' areas of responsibility

- 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 settings. 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, youth offending 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 lead 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 40 and reports made under regulations 44 and 45

Inspectors must regularly review notifications, [regulation 44](#) reports and [regulation 45](#). Inspectors must focus on both the content and the quality of the reports as part of their evaluation of how well the home monitors its impact on the experiences of children.

Information from any of these sources may result in:

- further activity, such as speaking to the registered manager and/or responsible individual or other stakeholders
- rescheduling of inspections based on either identified concerns within reports and/or notifications or based on a failure to submit reports or notifications

- lines of enquiry for the next inspection; emerging lines of enquiry must be noted in the inspection database and inform pre-inspection planning

Notifications under regulation 40

Registered persons (providers and managers) must notify Ofsted without delay about specific events and incidents as set out in [regulation 40](#) and in paragraphs 14.16 and 14.17 of the [Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards](#).

[Online forms and further guidance about notifications](#) are available. Providers should always seek advice from their lead inspector about individual cases if they are uncertain how to proceed. If a provider is notifying where regulation 40 does not require it, inspectors should discuss this with the provider at the inspection.

Where it is clear that the provider has taken appropriate action, the inspector should record this on the inspection database. If the lead 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 lead inspector should always contact the home to ask for more information.

Whenever there are concerns about the safety or welfare of a child, the lead inspector must contact the home's manager so that Ofsted is fully aware of the actions being taken by the home, the placing authority and other relevant parties (such as the host authority and police) to promote and safeguard the welfare of the child. Managers and staff should take into account the appropriate parts of the statutory guidance outlined in [Working together to safeguard children 2018](#).

If the lead inspector has any concern about the practice of either the placing or host local authority, this is managed in line with the policy [Concerns about children: guidance for all Ofsted staff](#). The DCS must be notified immediately of the concerns so that they can review the situation. This information also informs planning for any forthcoming local authority inspection.

Providers are required to notify Ofsted of the outcome of any child protection enquiry in line with regulations and statutory guidance. If the lead inspector requires an update on the progress of an investigation, the provider must send it by email and not through the notification system.

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 lead inspector should contact the home. Inspectors must always follow up any failure to notify Ofsted of the outcome.

Ofsted has a [memorandum of understanding with the DfE](#). This sets out an agreement that we will inform the DfE of certain matters notified to us by secure children's homes.

Reports under regulations 44 and 45

[Regulation 44](#) requires that an independent person visits the secure children's home at least once a month and that this visit may be unannounced. The regulation also requires that the independent person must write a report and provide a copy for HMCI. We therefore require that the independent person or provider sends the report for HMCI to us before the end of the month that follows the month in which the visit took place. This requirement still applies when there are

no children living in the home.

If the independent person has serious concerns about the safety and welfare of children arising from their visit, they should contact Ofsted immediately by either contacting the assigned inspector or via EYRegulatoryandSocialCare@ofsted.gov.uk

[Regulation 45](#) requires the registered person to produce a report at least every 6 months. When writing the report, the registered person should review the quality of the care provided by the home, the experiences of children living there and the impact the care is having on outcomes and improvements for children at the home.

Reports can be emailed to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. Providers and independent persons 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 heart of our inspections is a constructive, respectful and empathetic dialogue between inspectors and providers.

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

Inspectors always meet with the registered manager/person in charge at the beginning of the inspection to:

- outline the plan for the inspection and confirm whether it is a full or an assurance inspection
- arrange a security briefing and key induction
- arrange to interview the registered manager during the course of the inspection; if the registered manager is unavailable and the responsible individual is also unavailable to attend the inspection, the responsible individual should identify a representative.
- outline any lines of enquiry for the inspection, including those generated through the reading of the statement of purpose
- provide the person in charge with the opportunity to share any current information or personal issues relating to any of the children living in the home or members of staff that the inspectors need to be aware of during the inspection
- ensure that Ofsted holds the correct details on the inspection database, including email address and contact telephone numbers for the manager, registered provider and/or responsible individual, any other partners, or directors or trustees (see [Annex A](#))
- ensure that Ofsted hold records of the latest qualifications for the registered manager or

progress made on any qualifications being undertaken to comply with regulation 28

- arrange the approximate time that verbal feedback will be given and who is to receive this; feedback is normally be given to the registered manager or senior member of staff present and the responsible individual; additional senior staff linked to the home may also attend at the discretion of the lead inspector, if agreed in advance
- check the registered manager's welfare, and whether any steps need to be taken to ensure their well-being. The inspector should ascertain how to contact whoever is responsible for the registered manager's welfare on a day-to-day basis, so that they can pass on well-being concerns when appropriate and necessary
- provide the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns, or to seek clarification about the inspection, and explain how the provider can raise any matters during the inspection itself
- provide an opportunity for the registered manager to discuss and/or give us information on potential equalities duties, including reasonable adjustments for individuals

Inspectors will agree a process for keeping managers informed of progress throughout the inspection. This will normally mean regular meetings with managers to enable them to raise concerns or seek clarification. Inspectors will inform managers if there is evidence that the service may be judged inadequate. They will emphasise that final judgements are not made until the feedback meeting at the end of the inspection.

If the inspection has been prompted by our receiving information about a concern or allegation, the inspectors should explain to the registered manager or person in charge of the establishment or agency 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 inspectors 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 at the home is a core inspection activity. 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, care and protection that individual children have experienced. For sampled cases, the 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. 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.

Children's 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 a representative sample of children.

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

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

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

- children who have recently moved into the home where children are being prepared to return to the community or transferring to another secure provision, including the adult prison estate
- children who have recently left the home (whether their move was planned or unplanned)
- any children who have absconded from the home since the last inspection
- any child at risk of, or subject to, child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation
- children at risk of suicide or who self-harm
- any child who lives a considerable distance from their placing authority

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

Case files (either electronic or paper-based) are usually discussed with the staff member who knows the child well or a suitable colleague using their knowledge of the case, file structure and recording systems.

Case files are only one aspect of tracking the child's journey. Inspectors increase their understanding of the child's experience through evidence from other sources. These sources include observing practice and evidence from the child themselves, their carers, birth family (where appropriate), social worker, youth offending worker, the children's guardian, health and education professionals and other practitioners involved in their care. When tracking the case of a looked-after child, inspectors must always consult the independent reviewing officer, the placing social worker and the key worker and/or case manager.

Inspectors examine, discuss and evaluate cases in line with the evaluation criteria set out in the evaluation schedule. They look for evidence that living at the home has had a positive impact on the experiences and progress of children and how managers and staff know they are making a difference to children's 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

The views of children at the secure children's home provide important evidence of their experiences and progress.

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

Inspectors always try to meet with children during the inspection. Inspectors may make alternative arrangements to speak to children, such as telephone calls at a pre-arranged time. Sometimes, inspectors will spend time observing activities and situations when children are present rather than engaging in direct communication with them. This is to limit any stress caused to children. These approaches will be discussed throughout the inspection as necessary.

Many of the experiences of children living in the home take place after the normal education day and it is therefore essential that inspectors are present at this time.

Inspectors should involve the children in inspection activity wherever they can.

Opportunities to gather the views and experiences of children may include:

- asking children to show inspectors around their unit
- holding structured meetings
- spending time in the company of staff and children, observing their interactions
- having individual conversations
- joining in leisure activities
- preparing snacks or drinks
- spending mealtimes with children
- outdoor activities

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 appropriate alternative means of gathering children's views and providing them with feedback about the impact of their consultation.

Inspectors must take into account the specific communication needs of individual children. For some children, inspectors may request the assistance of staff or an independent person who know and understand the child's preferred means of communication, particularly if this is unique to the child. In other instances, it may also be appropriate for inspectors to spend time observing children and how they interact with staff and respond to their environment.

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

Children, including those with limited or no verbal communication, may wish to share their views in a letter to inspectors.

Practice when gathering the views of children

Inspectors demonstrate safe and sensitive practice by:

- agreeing with staff when and where conversations with children are taking place, who is involved and that children may leave the meeting at any time
- being sensitive to the fact that some children may not want to be involved in the inspection
- explaining to children 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,
- where appropriate, explaining to children that information suggesting that they or another child is at risk of harm will be passed by inspectors 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 home's scheduled activities as opportunities for observing and following lines of enquiry.

These activities could include:

- staff handover between shifts
- children's meetings
- staff meetings or briefings

Inspectors always try 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 may not always take place on site and may be through a telephone call during the inspection. These professionals may include:

- placing social workers
- youth offending workers
- independent reviewing officers
- local police
- the placing authority's quality assurance officer (or equivalent) and designated officer
- youth offending teams

- the YCS or independent visitors

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 other staff. The lead inspector should always try to talk to the responsible individual. The number of staff interviewed depends on the size of the home, but will include a sample of permanent staff and any agency staff working in the home at the time of inspection.

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

The lead inspector always asks to interview the responsible individual when:

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

The interview with the registered manager usually covers:

- issues that have arisen from pre-inspection information/early lines of enquiry
- discussions about the ethos of the home as described in the statement of purpose and any specific lines of enquiry arising from this
- the registered manager's evidence of the effectiveness of the home on the experiences and progress of the children living there and those who have recently left; this includes how the home works with individual children to meet their needs and the help on offer to support them to make and sustain attachments with adults
- questions about the theoretical and professional understanding and approach to work with vulnerable and upset children
- a summary of the needs of the children living at the home, including how any incidents or concerns are managed and the action taken to prevent similar situations or difficulties arising
- discussions about how regular routines are established for children around mealtimes, bedtimes, school and weekend activities
- the registered manager's knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home and plans for future development and how they effectively lead the team and promote a culture of continuous improvement
- discussions about helping children to have safe contact with their families and friends
- follow-up on progress in response to previous requirements and recommendations

the quality and effectiveness of practice-related supervision received by the manager and given by the manager to staff

- challenge and enquiry about the relationship of the children's home with other professionals and services
- plans for staff development, including arrangements to ensure that staff have obtained appropriate qualifications by the relevant dates
- discussions about the safe recruitment and selection of staff with the manager's qualification; if their qualification does not meet regulation 28 of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015, how they intend to obtain an appropriate qualification
- any further evidence that the manager may wish to highlight to the inspector

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

To help managers understand how the inspection is progressing, and to continue the constructive professional dialogue where meetings are held to keep them informed of emerging findings, the manager can be accompanied by a colleague, where appropriate. This will allow them to raise any issues or concerns or to seek clarification, including related to the conduct of the inspection.

If the registered manager is not present, inspectors will agree a process with the responsible individual (if available) for keeping other people informed of progress throughout the inspection.

The lead inspector usually meets with the registered person at the end of day 1 to share emerging findings. The lead inspector normally sets out for the manager what the inspection team intend to consider later in the inspection (where relevant) so that the manager can prepare or direct inspectors to any specific information or evidence required.

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

Inspectors want to establish that the home's monitoring systems are robust enough to identify any strengths and weaknesses in practice. Inspectors do not count medication or petty cash, carry out vehicle checks, check water temperatures or contents of fridges, freezers and food storage areas unless these are a specific line of enquiry.

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

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.

There may be exceptional occasions when we need to consider pausing an inspection. We will consider these on a case-by-case basis according to our published [guidance on pausing inspections](#).

Assessing financial viability

The children's homes regulations state that the 'registered provider must carry on the children's home in such manner as is likely to ensure that the home will be financially viable for the purpose of achieving the aims and objectives set out in its statement of purpose' (regulation 47(1) of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)).

Inspectors are only expected to carry out a lay person's assessment of the financial information. Their assessment of financial viability focuses on whether an applicant's financial plans appear broadly realistic and are likely to result in, at a minimum, acceptable outcomes for children. If, during the course of a routine inspection, the inspector has concerns about the financial viability of a provider due to, for example, 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 (regulation 47(3) of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)).

Examining records, policies and procedures

The home's statement of purpose should be available on its website and form part of the pre-inspection data. We should also hold a copy in our database because homes are required to submit this document to Ofsted whenever they are changed.

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

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 all relevant people so that they can care for the children safely and appropriately. When paper or electronic personnel records are maintained at the home, the inspectors may ask to see those records, if they are included within the lines of enquiry for the inspection. Homes can maintain electronic records if:

- they meet the requirements of regulation
- are appropriately accessible to children if they want to access their records
- staff have access to the information they require to care for those placed

If recruitment records are not maintained at the home, inspectors look at the home's list or electronic records that summarise the vetting and recruitment checks for staff. These records could be maintained in checklist or spreadsheet formats. The manager must be able to provide evidence that they are satisfied that all staff working at the home are fit to do so and that recruitment and selection arrangements comply with regulations 32 and 33 of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#).

If the provider uses the [DBS update service](#) to check the status of an individual's DBS certificate, the home 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, then the inspectors may request that a small sample of full personnel records are made available at the inspection visit.

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 all recruitment records relating to those staff. Therefore, in some instances, we recognise that the provider may not have all the information, including documents required by the regulations. If this is the 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 would include reference to employment records such as appraisals.

Finding evidence of possible offences

If, during the course of the inspection, inspectors think that an offence may have been committed, they should contact a social care compliance inspector or regulatory inspection manager (RIM) from the region that the home is situated in 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 other service users, as appropriate. 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.

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 after the inspection report is published. In some circumstances, inspectors will be required to keep any handwritten notes they have made during the inspection for longer. This may, for example, be necessary 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

Evidence gathering usually ends on day 2 of the on-site inspection. On day 3, an inspector team meeting is held on site to discuss and agree the inspection outcomes and judgements. Inspectors reflect on their evidence and develop key evaluative statements for verbal feedback that are provided to the lead inspector.

Inspectors 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 lead inspector.

In some circumstances, the inspectors 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.

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 provider 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.

Inspectors should:

- cover the main findings of the inspection, including both strengths and weaknesses
- clearly communicate the likely judgements
- indicate likely requirements and recommendations, with clear reference to the relevant regulation or guidance [Guide to the regulations and quality standards](#), providing a clear direction for improvement
- use the grade descriptors and the evidence to clearly indicate how the judgements have been reached
- ensure that the provider has the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns, or to seek clarification about the inspection, and can contact Ofsted on the working day after the end of the inspection, if necessary
- confirm [when the 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.

Managers may share the provisional inspection outcome and findings with whoever they deem appropriate, though providers may need to be cautious/sensitive to the risk of provisional outcomes that may be subject to change potentially being shared with children when this could create uncertainty for them. Provisional inspection outcomes may also be shared, in confidence, with others who are not involved with the setting. This may include the managers' colleagues, family members, medical advisers and/or wider support group. However, the information should not be made public.

Feedback to children

Where possible, inspectors should arrange with the registered manager (or person in charge) to give feedback to children, as appropriate to their age and understanding. Inspectors will make efforts to address matters raised by children.

Making requirements and recommendations

Requirements

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

When imposing a requirement, inspectors must ensure that there is enough evidence to support the breach and that they are able to show that this is having an impact, or is likely to have an impact, on children's 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 should be detailed enough for the registered person to be clear about what they need to do to correct the breach of regulation 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 whether the matter could be dealt with more appropriately by making a recommendation.

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

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 inspectors must be clear at the inspection feedback what the requirement and its deadline is.

Recommendations

Inspectors make recommendations when necessary to improve practice.

In 2015, the DfE published the [Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards](#) that explains and supplements the regulations.

The Guide is made under [section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000](#). Providers are required to take the Guide into account. Ofsted must also take it into account when making decisions under the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Guide replaced the national minimum standards. Registered persons must have regard to the Guide in interpreting and meeting the regulations. If the registered person does not have regard to the Guide, this may result in a failure to meet the regulations. This may influence the inspection judgement and may result in requirements being imposed or recommendations being made.

In making a recommendation, inspectors should refer to the Guide. They should always provide enough detail to ensure that the registered person is clear what they need to do. The relevant part of the Guide should be summarised and the page and paragraph number included. 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](#)
- [Health care standards for children in secure settings](#)

If, during an inspection, the registered person rectifies a minor administrative error that has minimal impact on the experiences and progress of children, inspectors 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 inspectors, we consider carefully whether it is necessary to take any enforcement action to address the breach and the associated risks to children living in the home. Enforcement action may include, but is not limited to, issuing a compliance notice.

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

Compliance notices and enforcement action

Ofsted's compliance powers are set out in [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 that this is the most appropriate way to promote the welfare of children or we believe that they are being harmed or at risk of harm
- a registered provider has failed to comply with a requirement made at an inspection and we consider that this is the most appropriate way to deal with this concern

Inadequate judgements: next steps

Post-inspection debrief and case reviews

When a secure children's home is judged inadequate for 'the overall experiences and progress of children' at a full inspection, 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 DfE is informed so that the Secretary of State can take this into account in determining the continued approval of the home.

If an assurance inspection identifies that the home has serious or widespread concerns, this also leads to a post-inspection debrief and then a case review on the same timescales, and the DfE being informed.

The lead inspector and a manager from the region in which the secure children's home is situated, 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 of further action which 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.

If enforcement action is taken, the DfE is informed by the lead inspector of the actions being taken.

Subsequent inspection activity

The timing and nature of subsequent inspection and monitoring visits following a judgement of inadequate is set on a case-by-case basis. We always return to carry out some inspection activity within 6 to 8 weeks to ensure that children are safe. This is either a monitoring visit or a full inspection. 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 adequate steps to safeguard and protect the welfare of children living in the home. A monitoring visit usually results in a published report, although regional directors can decide not to publish monitoring reports in exceptional circumstances.

The lead inspector informs the DfE of the outcome of a monitoring visit.

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

All inadequacy is serious and requires immediate action to be taken. However, in some cases, the inadequacy derives from fire risks, health and safety hazards or other environmental factors.

Although serious and high risk for children, these can be quickly rectified in many instances. Inspectors always seek to understand how and why the serious inadequacy has occurred.

If the concerns are serious, but generally limited to one area of risk and likely to be rectified relatively quickly, we may in specific circumstances be satisfied at the monitoring visit that the situation has been made safe for children. We seek assurance that leaders and managers can and are acting appropriately in respect of their responsibilities. The home must have met all requirements in full. In these instances, the inspectors may determine that an improved inspection judgement can be awarded. If this is the case, the monitoring visit results in a new inspection judgement.

If the situation has not improved enough, or there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the matter has been addressed fully, the inadequate judgement remains, a report of the monitoring visit is published with the original judgement and we decide what steps to take next.

We consider new inspection judgements in circumstances where:

- the RIM agrees that the concerns are discrete enough and that without these very specific concerns, the home would have achieved a higher inspection judgement
- the home has a previous good track record of addressing concerns and issues and there are no concerns about the leadership and management of the home or the protection of children
- the nature of the concerns means they can be rectified quickly

Therefore, if we have followed up an inadequate judgement with a monitoring visit, the outcome may be to:

- discuss with the DfE so that the Secretary of State can consider the continued approval of the home
- carry out further monitoring and take steps towards cancellation
- schedule a full inspection (usually within 16 weeks from the original inspection), the results of which could be used to support Ofsted taking formal enforcement action (such as, but not limited to cancellation) or give the home the opportunity to show improvement and secure an improved inspection judgement
- consider whether the monitoring visit provides enough evidence to secure an improved inspection judgement

If a secure children's home is judged inadequate overall, a case review will make a decision as to whether the areas of children's health and children's education and learning need to be a part of the full reinspection. This decision is based on the evidence from the last inspection and/or monitoring visit, and whether there are concerns in these areas that require further inspection. The views of the Principal Officer, Further Education and Skills, and the Health and Justice Manager (CQC) will be sought to inform the case review decision.

If it is decided that children's health and/or children's education and learning will not be reinspected, the lead inspector will inform the registered person at the start of the full reinspection of the areas that will or will not be evaluated. The inspection report will include a brief summary at the start of the overall experiences and progress of children section, which explains that the areas concerned will not be inspected on this occasion. The relevant report sections will show as 'not judged'.

Feedback to local authorities

Whenever children are at immediate risk, inspectors must follow Ofsted's [Safeguarding policy](#). In addition, whenever a secure children's home is judged inadequate at the full inspection, the lead inspector must alert the placing authority for any child currently placed in the home to the concerns that have been identified. The lead inspector must also notify the local authority where the home is based because they have a duty to safeguard the welfare of all children living in the local authority area. This also applies if we have judged a home to have serious or widespread concerns at the assurance inspection and it has been agreed at the case review that the relevant local authorities should be notified.

The lead inspector sends an email to the YCS where it commissions places at the home, and to directors of children's services in the relevant local authorities after the case review when we have decided what further action to take. Ofsted follows this email up with a telephone call to ensure receipt. When there are a large number of placing authorities, the lead inspector should discuss arrangements for contacting them with the responsible manager for the region that the home is situated in. The lead inspector should also ensure that the email to the YCS and local authorities is forwarded to the provider.

The lead inspector gives feedback to the YCS and relevant local authorities in line with the feedback given to the provider and that will appear in the report. This must include a summary of the main concerns so that the YCS and relevant local authorities understand these and can make their own decisions. The lead inspector must make clear that the provider has not at this point had an opportunity to challenge the findings.

The details of the email and any phone calls must be recorded on the inspection database for future reference and the email or letter should be shared with the provider.

Further guidance on contacting the director of children's services is available in [social care enforcement policy](#).

We contact the YCS and placing authorities to follow HMCI's powers detailed in paragraph 8 of schedule 13 of the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), 'to provide assistance to other public authorities in the exercise of the placing authorities' functions'.

Contacting the Office of the Children's Commissioner

After emailing the relevant local authorities, the inspector will also email the Office of the Children's Commissioner to let the Children's Commissioner know about the inadequate judgement or when we have judged that a home has serious or widespread concerns at the assurance inspection. The Commissioner has a statutory power to provide advice and assistance to any child who is living away from home or receiving social care.

The email will contain the details of the home and the names of the placing authorities of the children currently placed in the home. This information will enable the Commissioner to perform

their statutory functions to offer support to these children and, if necessary, make representations on the children's behalf. The inspector will make it clear that the home has not at this point had an opportunity to challenge the findings.

Children who are not looked after

The local authority is not the placing authority (as set out in the definition of a placing authority in regulation 2 of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)) for children's homes that accommodate children who are not looked after. Inspectors need to ensure that the relevant organisation or people who are the placing authority are alerted to the inadequate judgement. For example, they should send a copy of the inspection report to the YCS.

The inspection report

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

Reports for settings that have several weaknesses or that are found to be outstanding may require more detailed explanations for the judgements but should still focus on the main issues only. 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
Judgements	The judgements made and a single sentence that is standardised according to the overall judgement
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
Recent inspection history	Inspection judgements from recent years
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

Children's homes reports

We publish secure children's homes inspection reports on our [reports website](#).

An amendment to regulations as set out in [The Registration and Inspection of Education, Children's Services and Skills \(Fees and Frequency of Inspections\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2024](#) allows HMCI to make inspection reports of secure children's homes publicly available.

Published inspection reports do not contain any information that identifies an individual child or staff member at the home.

Published reports contain:

- the name of the responsible individual
- the name and address of the registered provider (where the provider is an organisation)
- the recent inspection history
- details of any enforcement activity since the last inspection

The reports are only searchable by the provider's URN, by local authority area or by region (for example the North West, the Midlands). The reports are not searchable by postcode.

Child-friendly summary reports

Inspectors complete a child-friendly summary following every full inspection of a secure children's home. This will not be published. If children need an adapted form of summary, the report should be sent to the provider with a request for the document to be adapted into a suitable format.

When we know that children use individual, alternative systems of communication to verbal communication, or children have limited receptive and expressive language skills, we still provide a child-friendly summary. It can be short, include pictures and be set in simple, concrete sentences.

It is anticipated that secure children's homes staff will translate the child-friendly summary, if necessary, for those children who speak English as an additional language and for those who use alternative systems of communication. The summary can set out an expectation that staff will support children to understand their letter from Ofsted.

Quality assurance and arrangements for publishing the report

The lead inspector is responsible for the quality of the report. The lead inspector will check the completed report carefully before submitting it 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.

We expect managers to share the inspection outcome and findings with whoever they deem appropriate.

Following the inspection, we will ask providers for feedback about the inspection through a post-inspection survey. This is sent to the provider when it receives the final inspection report. We will use feedback from providers to improve the quality of inspections

Conduct during inspections

Ofsted's [code of conduct](#) sets out the expectations for both inspectors and providers. At the start of the inspection (usually during the preparatory conversations) the lead inspector will explain these expectations and will ask providers to read the code. Inspectors will work constructively with providers and staff, demonstrating professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times.

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 lead inspector as soon as possible during the inspection visit. This provides an opportunity to resolve the matter before the inspection is completed. Any concerns raised, and actions taken, will be recorded in the inspection evidence.

If, during the inspection, the provider is unable to resolve the matter with the lead inspector, they should contact a RIM in the region where the home is situated for further discussion.

If an issue remains unresolved, the provider can contact Ofsted on the working day after the end of the inspection. This will be an opportunity for the provider to raise informal 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 a RIM who is independent of the inspection to discuss and to resolve, where appropriate, at the earliest opportunity.

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

Assurance inspections

Timeline

The usual timeframe for assurance inspections in working days is:

Day	Assurance inspection activity
1	Preparation
2	Site visit
3	Drafting report
4 to 7	Inspection evidence and report submitted for quality assurance

20	Draft report sent to the registered provider within 18 working days from the end of the inspection. The provider then has up to 5 working days to send in comments on the draft report or submit a formal complaint
25	Provider returns the report with comments or submits a formal complaint within 5 working days
32	Final report sent to the registered provider within 30 working days of the end of the visit (longer if there has been a complaint)
37	The final report will be published on the Ofsted reports site 5 days after it is sent to the provider

Figure 1: Ofsted's post-inspection and complaints procedure



[View this information in an accessible format.](#)

Assurance inspection findings

Assurance inspections will result in a single judgement based on the finding of the inspection. An assurance inspection focuses on the safety and welfare of children and the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Inspectors will use the following descriptors as the benchmarks against which to evaluate practice. Our findings, however, are not derived from a checklist. Some criteria will have less relevance than others in some settings because of the nature of the setting and the needs of the children. Inspectors will look for evidence in the following 3 areas. They will also use their professional judgement to determine whether or not the home has any serious or widespread concerns.

The care of children

- Children have trusted and secure relationships with staff.
- Children's social, physical, emotional, educational and mental health needs are well understood and effectively promoted.
- Children's views are understood and taken into account and their rights and entitlements are promoted and met.

The safety of children

- Risks are identified, understood and managed effectively.
- Staff are well prepared and supported to respond appropriately to children who may go missing or may be at risk of harm.

- Staff are well prepared and supported to manage challenging situations and unsafe behaviour effectively.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

- Leaders and managers use the findings from internal and external monitoring to improve the progress and experiences of children.
- Leaders and managers take robust action to address complaints or issues of concern.
- Leaders and managers ensure that there are sufficient suitably trained and experienced staff to meet children's individual needs.
- Leaders and managers have responded effectively to the requirements and recommendations made at the home's last inspection.
- The home is effectively and efficiently managed by a permanent, suitably experienced and qualified registered manager. Urgent action is taken to address any vacancy of the registered manager post. Any impact on children of there being no registered manager is understood and is being addressed.

Reporting findings at assurance inspections

Assurance inspections will lead to a concise narrative report.

The report will clearly state whether inspectors identified any serious or widespread concerns as a result of practice that:

- places children at risk of inadequate protection or significant harm
- leads to children's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted

The report will set out:

- whether children are safe and well cared for, including any shortfalls in the quality of care being provided and their impact on children's experiences
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers and any improvements that the provider has made since the last inspection, and the impact of this on the safety and welfare of children
- requirements and recommendations for improvement, as necessary

We will publish the report on [Ofsted's reports website](#).

Serious and widespread concerns: next steps

Any serious or widespread concerns will lead to a post-visit debrief between the inspector and the RIM 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. In line with current [statutory guidance](#), the inspector must alert the placing authority for any child

currently placed in the home to the concerns that have been identified. The inspector must also notify the local authority where the home is based.

The inspector sends an email to the directors of children's services in the relevant local authorities and the YCS where a child is placed by them, by the end of the next working day following the visit. The inspector will follow this email up with a telephone call to ensure that it has been received. The inspector should also ensure that the email to the YCS and local authorities is forwarded to the provider.

The post-visit debrief should review the evidence and consider a recommendation for further action to take to the case review. The recommendation of further action should address the scheduling of future inspections, visits and/or enforcement 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.

If concerns are serious, we are likely to return to carry out a monitoring visit or a full inspection within 6 to 8 weeks to check that the manager and responsible person have taken sufficient steps to safeguard the welfare of children.

Monitoring visits

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

We will usually carry out a monitoring visit to a setting:

- to monitor compliance and enforcement
- to monitor progress after an inadequate inspection
- if the specific nature of our concerns means a monitoring visit is the best course of action

There may be circumstances in which it is appropriate to give notice, for example if it is important for the provider or manager to be on site to respond to our enquiries.

The decision to carry out a statutory inspection or a monitoring visit is usually made by the RIM at a case review.

Monitoring visits for inadequate provision

The decision to carry out a monitoring visit is usually taken at a case review. The case review will decide, based on the presenting concerns, what resource is needed to carry out a monitoring visit. The views of the Principal Officer, Further Education and Skills, and the Health and Justice

Manager (CQC) may be sought to inform the case review decision. The frequency of monitoring visits is decided on a case-by-case basis and may be as frequent as weekly if that is what is 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 lead 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.

The monitoring visit should:

- determine whether the requirements have been met, and the impact of this on the welfare of and outcomes for children
- 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

If we have carried out a monitoring visit, the outcome may be to:

- carry out further monitoring and take steps towards cancellation
- schedule a full inspection (usually within 16 weeks of the original inspection), which may either support our steps to cancel the home's registration or give the home the opportunity to show improvement and secure an improved inspection judgement
- consider whether the monitoring visit provides enough evidence to secure an improved inspection judgement

Monitoring compliance notices

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. The decision to issue a compliance notice is agreed and recorded at the case review.

When we have issued a compliance notice, we will carry out a monitoring visit or inspection to assess compliance with the notice. This will be within 5 working days of the date set in the notice for compliance with the requirement. A registered person must fully comply with the requirement within the timeframe specified. Partial action will not be sufficient, although we may take it into account in deciding the next steps.

If we have served multiple compliance notices with different completion dates, we will schedule follow-up visits for each completion date. These visits can be combined if the dates are close together and if we do not exceed 5 working days from the date of any notice.

We will decide whether the monitoring visit will be announced or unannounced on a case-by-case

basis. The decision will usually be made as part of the case review, in which we should explore how best to gather evidence to assess compliance with a notice. When we decide that there should be a notice period, this should always be as short as is practically possible.

During a monitoring visit, inspectors must:

- check that children are safe and well cared for
- check that the requirements for any compliance notices of which the completion timescales have passed have been met

Inspectors may also find evidence that a registered person is failing to meet requirements other than those specified in our compliance notice(s). They should discuss this with the provider and make any requirements or recommendations they consider necessary to remedy the problem.

If the case review decision is that the compliance notice has been met, we confirm this in the monitoring or inspection report. We then consider whether to close the compliance case.

If the case review decision is that a compliance notice has not been met, the case review must consider what further action we will take. Failure to comply is a ground for cancellation. If a provider fails to comply with a notice, we should either take steps to cancel its registration or issue a further notice. Although an offence has been committed under section 22A(4) of the Care Standards Act 2000, the case review must consider whether pursuing prosecution is the most appropriate action. Any decision to suspend or cancel the registration of a secure children's home must be made by the National Director, Regulation and Social Care, or the Deputy Director, Regulation and Social Care Practice.

If the registered person has complied with the requirements set out in the notice but we observe a different failure during a visit, this does not constitute a failure to comply with the notice. The case review should consider whether this breach can be resolved by a requirement or a further compliance notice.

Monitoring for any other reason

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

We inform them that we are looking at a concern, and of any information we have that suggests non-compliance. They can then provide additional information. If we relay our concerns to the person in charge instead of the registered person, we ask and record how they will inform the registered person of what we have said.

We will share as much information about the concerns as possible. We may not do so if there is an allegation about an individual linked to the setting or where sharing the information could compromise another agency's investigation. We will always follow our whistle-blowing policy.

If the information is from a whistle-blower or from someone who wishes to remain anonymous, then we must take the utmost care to ensure that the person's identity is not revealed. We may tell the registered person(s) or person in charge the information came from a whistle-blower or

someone who wishes to remain anonymous, but we should give them as much information as possible in the interests of openness. However, inspectors should avoid giving information, for example names, dates, time periods and locations, that might lead the registered person or person in charge to identify the source of the information. Information that is not relevant to the concern should not be provided.

The inspector should not confirm, deny or comment on any attempt by the registered person or person in charge to guess the name or other personal details of the source of the information. The inspector should be clear with the manager that they cannot comment in this regard.

Inspectors will summarise the information at appropriate times during the inspection or visit. They will share this with the registered person or person in charge. This allows the registered person to consider matters as they emerge. Inspectors will ensure that they fully understand and note any responses correctly. This also helps the registered person to consider any other evidence they wish us to know about.

We will use all the information we have gathered to determine whether the registered person:

- is complying with the relevant requirements
- is meeting statutory requirements and remains suitable for registration
- has committed an offence

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 aspects slip so that children and/or vulnerable adults are at risk of harm or are not making sufficient progress, then the inspector should decide what further action needs to be taken. This includes new requirements and/or recommendations and compliance notices or other enforcement action such as restriction of accommodation or imposing of conditions. If enforcement action is carried out, the lead inspector informs the DfE.

If the inspectors are concerned or unsure about any aspect of the visit, they can contact a RIM for the region that the home is situated in or a social care compliance inspector.

Feedback at the end of the monitoring visit

The inspector must summarise the information at appropriate times during the visit and share this with the provider or manager. The inspector should consider other matters as they emerge, pursue other lines of questioning and ensure that they have fully understood and noted the responses correctly.

The inspector will provide verbal feedback to the provider at the end of the visit. The inspector should:

- explain the decisions clearly and with examples

- explain the options for further action, non-statutory and statutory, if there is evidence that the provider is failing or has failed to meet statutory requirements – or the conditions of its registration – which may result in enforcement action
- ensure that what they say to the provider is fully consistent with the evidence
- be proportionate and fair, in line with our enforcement policy
- 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
- contact the DfE about the outcome of monitoring visits following an inadequate judgement so that the Secretary of State can take this into account in determining the continued approval of the home.

The lead inspector must also 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, or
- there has been no change of judgement and either the original concerns remain or new ones have emerged

Monitoring visit 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. We should set out when we last visited the home and for what purpose, for example whether it was an assurance inspection or full inspection.

The report must:

- set out the reason(s) for and purpose of the visit
- 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 on children of continued concerns on children, alongside any action that Ofsted will be taking to notify the DfE, placing local authorities and/or to protect children
- set out clearly where and 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 can clearly state that the provider is likely to be subject to further enforcement action

when 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, if relevant.

The lead inspector informs the DfE of the outcome of monitoring visits.

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 report' section](#)).

Checks on responsible individuals

The [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) require secure children's homes 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 a responsible individual who has been appointed to a registered establishment or agency is fit to supervise the management of an establishment or agency.

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

Inspections where no children are living in the home

If there are no children present at the first inspection after registration, we carry out an assurance inspection. This focuses on whether the service continues to meet registration requirements. The inspector must use the assurance inspection report template and make the following statement in the report:

“ The secure children's home has not provided [accommodation] to [children] since its registration on [insert date of registration]. This inspection focuses on whether the secure children's home meets its statutory requirements in order to maintain its registration and is ready to accept placements. [Inspector to include any relevant text]”

In these instances, inspectors do not make a judgement. If the requirements of registration are not met, the inspector can raise requirements or recommendations.

If a home has no children in placement at the time of the inspection but has accommodated since the last inspection and intends to admit children within the next 3 months, the lead inspector, in consultation with the appropriate manager for the region that the home is situated in, determines what the most appropriate type of inspection is. This is usually a full inspection. The inspection focuses on whether the registration requirements continue to be met, including whether it has appropriate management arrangements so that it is suitable to accommodate children. The inspection also takes into account any changes the provider has made to improve the quality of the care provided.

If children have been accommodated since the last inspection, it may be possible to use information about their placements as evidence about the experiences and progress of children. Inspection activity can include talking to children who have recently left and the professionals who have worked with them.

If a home does not have children living there, does not intend to accommodate children for at least 3 months, we can impose a condition that means we do not have to routinely inspect the home. We do this by sending a notice of proposal to the provider and then a notice of decision. The condition must be worded as follows:

“ [The home] must inform the Chief Inspector of their intention to accommodate children at the home at least 3 months before any child is accommodated.”

The condition set out above must be in place in order for the secure children's home to be exempt from inspection.

We will not inspect the home for as long as the condition is in place but can do so at any time if we choose to.

When the home is ready to accept placements again, it must tell us at least 3 months before it does so. We must visit close to the proposed reopening date so that we can assess whether there are concerns.

The condition should be removed following a visit to ensure that the provider and premises remain fit for registration. If the condition is removed between 1 April and 30 September in any year, we will carry out one inspection (usually a full inspection) before 31 March of the following year. If the condition is removed between 1 October and 31 March, we will not inspect until the following inspection year (starting 1 April), unless we receive information that causes us concern.

Homes with no registered manager

The [Care Standards Act 2000](#) requires any person who carries on or manages a secure children's home to be registered with Ofsted. It is a criminal offence to operate or manage a secure children's home without registering with Ofsted (section 11 of the Care Standards Act 2000).

If there is no manager in charge of the home, the inspectors should raise a requirement under

regulation 27 of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#). Regulations 48 and 49 require the responsible individual to notify Ofsted if the manager is to be absent for 28 days or more or if they leave.

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 guidance on our [Changes to children's social care services that are registered and/or inspected by Ofsted](#) page.

Actions 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 secure children's home. 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 Ofsted can take, please refer to the [social care enforcement policy](#).

Homes for disabled children

When evaluating how well disabled children are helped and protected, inspectors should pay particular attention to how well staff understand the particular vulnerabilities of disabled children to abuse and neglect by taking account of:

- the effectiveness and impact of safeguarding training for all staff, including nursing staff where relevant, and how this has specifically raised awareness and understanding of the protection needs of disabled children
- the quality and effectiveness of the work to help disabled children keep themselves safe and, wherever possible, to develop an understanding of managing personal boundaries and developing appropriate relationships
- how staff respond to triggers or changes in behaviour for each child or unusual patterns of bruising or injury, including for those children with limited or no verbal communication, that may indicate that they may be at risk or have been subject to abuse
- how records of behaviour management and restraint confirm that staff use identified individual strategies that consider children's communication, physical and learning needs to divert and minimise incidents and physical intervention
- whether staff administer pro re nata (PRN) or 'as required' medication appropriately and retain clear records of its administration
- whether children have access to advocates or independent visitors who spend enough time interacting with and observing children and staff to gather children's views, wishes and feelings in order to reach a judgement about their safety and welfare

Incomplete inspections

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

Approval of secure children's homes

The Secretary of State makes decisions about the approval of secure children's homes. When requested by the DfE, Ofsted will contribute to the Secretary of State's evaluation and provide appropriate advice. See the [Memorandum of understanding between Ofsted and the DfE: secure children's homes](#).

The DfE will review the approval at least every 3 years using Ofsted inspection evidence and other information (such as that provided by the DfE architectural adviser).

Positive environments where children can flourish

Inspectors should use [Positive environments where children can flourish](#) to evaluate how providers, managers and carers create a positive environment for children to live and learn in and where staff interact positively with children. This guidance applies to all social care inspections and to the inspection of schools.

This guidance is not a summary of the law or guidance on the area of physical intervention and restriction of liberty. This is about an approach to inspection.

Inspecting homes where young adults live

The [Care Standards Act 2000](#) requires a secure children's home to provide care and accommodation 'wholly or mainly' for children. This does not prevent a home from accommodating a young adult or adults, as long as it accommodates more children than adults. A child is defined as a person under the age of 18.

There are circumstances when it is in the best interests for children to continue living at a secure children's home beyond their 18th birthday. The reasons for this may include when:

- the young person's release date, if they are sentenced, ends a short period of time after their 18th birthday and relevant professionals and agencies agree that moving the young person to the adult estate would not be in their best interests
- a young person's plan is to transition to the adult estate and the most appropriate placement does not become available until after their 18th birthday, or they wish to finish their educational course before transition and relevant professionals and agencies are in agreement

A child or young person cannot stay in a secure children's home unless there is a legal order authorising their detention in secure accommodation.

Ofsted's duty to inspect secure children's homes, provided by section 31(3)(a) of the Care

Standards Act 2000, remains in place even if the home only accommodates young adults at the time of the inspection. This does not apply to a volunteer, a member of staff or other person living at the secure children's home.

The [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) apply to children and young adults living at the home.

Inspectors can discuss the operation of the secure children's home with any young adult residing at the home.

Inspectors should, wherever possible and appropriate, ask a young adult's permission to view their records, unless their mental capacity means that informed consent is not possible.

Secure children's homes are not required to carry out a DBS check on young adult residents. However, homes must identify any potential impact on the children also living in the home.

Ofsted may take action or impose conditions to address any impact that young adults accommodated at a home are having on children living in the home.

Homes should have in place appropriate transition plans for every young adult living there to ensure that their move from the home is planned and that their stay in the children's home is appropriate.

Guidelines for judging whether a home is meeting the 'wholly or mainly' policy

We apply the 'wholly or mainly' policy over a reasonable period of time, rather than on any given day. This is to take into account children's homes' individual circumstances and the needs and best interests of children and young adults.

In the majority of circumstances, we determine whether a home is 'wholly or mainly' for children over a 12-month period. This means that, for the majority of time in any 12-month period, a home must accommodate more children than young adults, even if at times it does not. We will accept any 12-month period for this definition. It is not restricted to calendar or academic years.

We expect all providers (regardless of whether they are using the flexibility in the 'wholly or mainly' policy or not) to identify the risk and impact of every young adult living at the home on any children at the home. We expect providers to take action to minimise the risks and the negative impact on children.

Every child in the home must have a regularly updated and reviewed moving-on plan and care plan, including a transition plan if the child will require support from adult social care or is serving a sentence and will be moving to the adult prison estate. This is to ensure that homes use the 'wholly or mainly' policy in the best interests of children and not as a way of circumventing the law or allowing young people to stay beyond a reasonable period of time.

Inspecting and enforcing the 'wholly or mainly' policy

Inspectors check whether secure children's homes are complying with the 'wholly or mainly' policy. If we believe that providers are not complying with the 'wholly or mainly' policy, we will consider what action to take. This may include taking enforcement action against the home for failing to comply with its statement of purpose or for failing to run the establishment as a secure children's home. We may also impose bespoke conditions on its registration if our concern relates to the impact of young adults on children at the home.

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 children and vulnerable adults policy](#).

Inspectors should contact an appropriate manager or regional social care compliance inspector if they need advice.

The lead 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 YCS where the child is placed by them or the DCS for the responsible placing local authority, if 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.

Closed cultures

The Care Quality Commission developed the concept of closed cultures. Its project [Closed Cultures](#) explains how some services have inherent risks that need to be mitigated if those living there are to be safe. This work is relevant to some places where children live away from home.

Not all settings with inherent risks develop a closed culture. Some may develop a closed culture over time. In effective settings, leaders and managers recognise the risks and take appropriate steps to mitigate them.

Closed cultures are more likely to develop in services where:

- the children live a long way from home
- the children are vulnerable and have no or very limited verbal communication
- the children stay at the setting for long periods of time, without going home or taking part in community activities
- there is weak leadership
- staff lack the right skills, training or experience to support and care for children well
- there is a lack of positive and open engagement between managers, staff, children and their families and professionals
- the setting is geographically isolated
- all services are delivered in-house and there is no oversight from external professional bodies
- staff are drawn from a small pool of possible employees; they are often related to each other or are close friends, and so cliques develop, which makes it very difficult for staff or children to complain or raise concerns safely
- leaders and managers are not part of external professional networks

It is important that providers and inspectors understand the risks in closed cultures. We expect inspectors to use their professional curiosity to explore with leaders and managers the actions they take where inherent risks exist. If an inspector has any doubts or concerns, they should discuss these with their manager during the inspection.

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 the RIM for the region that a secure children's home is situated in, who may seek specialist advice. If inspectors are unable to contact the RIM and remain concerned, they should follow Ofsted's [Safeguarding concerns: guidance for inspectors](#).

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 when 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 Ofsted's [Safeguarding concerns: guidance for inspectors](#).

Reporting concerns about the administration and management of controlled drugs

Providers must report incidents related to controlled drugs (including loss or theft) to their local NHS controlled drugs accountable officer at NHS England. They should also report incidents to the police, if necessary.

If inspectors become aware of an incident related to controlled drugs that the provider has not reported to the appropriate authority, they should convene a case review to consider next steps. Actions may include the Ofsted region making the referral. This action is in addition to any regulatory action or recommendations made because of the concern. Inspectors should make a referral even when there are no requirements or recommendations to be made.

For full inspections of secure children's homes, Ofsted is assisted by the CQC in its evaluation of health services provided for children. For assurance and/or monitoring inspections of secure children's home's, Ofsted may request the assistance of a CQC inspector if there are health-related matters where the inspection would benefit from the CQC's input. If concerns about controlled drugs management at a secure children's home relate to a registered healthcare provider, the CQC may decide to take enforcement action.

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

Qualifications of registered managers and staff in secure children's homes

Registered manager qualifications

Regulation 28 of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 requires a registered manager to obtain the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Care or an equivalent qualification.

Any manager starting to manage a home has 3 years to gain the qualification.

Regulation 28 does allow for the date to gain the qualification to be deferred if a manager has a break in managing a home or if they have worked part time.

If a registered manager has not gained the qualification or equivalent in the 3 years, they are in breach of regulation 28 if they did not have a reason for a deferral. Inspectors should raise a requirement. This means that the judgement for the effectiveness of leaders and managers cannot be outstanding.

The lead inspector should check that the manager is undertaking the qualification and their estimated completion date. If they are not registered to undertake the qualification or will not complete it by the relevant date without good reason, inspectors should raise a requirement. This means that the judgement for the effectiveness of leaders and managers cannot be outstanding.

If the registered manager holds a qualification they regard as equivalent, they should explain to the lead inspector how their qualification meets the competencies in the Level 5 Diploma and any additional training they have completed to fill any gaps. If they cannot explain this satisfactorily, then inspectors should raise a requirement. This means that the judgement for the effectiveness of leaders and managers cannot be outstanding.

Staff qualifications

Regulation 32 of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 require secure children's home staff to have the appropriate experience, qualifications and skills for the work they will perform. For staff in a care role, the regulation requires them to obtain the Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare or an equivalent qualification.

Any staff member starting to work in a care role has 2 years to gain the qualification.

Regulation 32 does allow for the date to gain the qualification to be deferred if the staff member has a break in working in a home or if they have worked part time.

Inspectors should take the following into account:

- the attitude and knowledge of the registered person in relation to staff training and development
- the impact of lack of qualification/training on practice and in particular the quality of care provided to those living in the children's home
- the rationale and individual circumstances taken into account for staff who have been granted a deferral of the time period required to attain the qualification, and arrangements for review of that deferral

When none, or very few, of the staff in a home are qualified, and there is no prospect that the remaining staff will achieve the qualification within 6 months or by the relevant date, the judgement for the effectiveness of leaders and managers is likely to be inadequate, and certainly no more than requires improvement. Only in exceptional circumstances can the home be judged good for the effectiveness of leaders and managers and inspectors must clearly explain these circumstances in the report.

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.

Annex for figures

Ofsted's post-inspection and complaints procedure

Steps	Description
Step 1	The provider should raise any concerns during an inspection with the lead inspector in the first instance
Step 2	If an issue remains unresolved, the provider can ring Ofsted during the inspection or on the working day after
Step 3	We will normally send a draft report to the provider within 18 working days of the end of the inspection
Step 4	Within 5 working days of us sending a draft report, the provider can raise minor points about the report or submit a formal complaint
Step 5a	We will consider minor points of clarity or factual accuracy quickly so that the report can be published promptly
Step 5b	We will respond to any formal complaint before we finalise and send the report to the provider
Step 6	We will normally send the final report to the provider within 30 working days of the end of the inspection (longer if there has been a complaint). The report will be published on our website 5 working days later

[See Figure 1.](#)

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