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Guidance

Summary of framework changes

Updated 20 March 2026

Applies to England

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This summary outlines changes to inspection practice. This does not include corrections or changes made to improve clarity in how the framework is written.

March 2026

Expanded the introduction, setting out what we mean when we refer to abuse, neglect and exploitation (see Child protection section) and how we inspect in the context of the children's social care reforms (see Children's social care reforms section).

Redrafted the evaluation criteria for our judgement on "the experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection" to reflect that local authorities are implementing 'family help' as part of the children's social care reforms. The updates include more emphasis on helping children by engaging family networks and a new section focused on multi-agency working.

Amended the evaluation criteria for our judgements on the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers to:

- highlight engagement of family networks and helping children to create and maintain trusting relationships
- better align the criteria about health and emotional well-being between these 2 judgements
- highlight the local authority working with the virtual school to support children's educational attendance and achievement

Amended the evaluation criteria for our judgement on the impact of leaders on practice with children and families to:

- highlight multi-agency working
- highlight continuous professional development for leaders and practitioners, particularly in the context of the children's social care reforms

Removed the overall effectiveness judgement. We have updated the section on applying a proportionate and risk-based approach to inspection to explain how we will make decisions about inspections and visits.

Simplified guidance on giving feedback at the end of the inspection to help focus these meetings on the findings from fieldwork. We have also made it clearer that discussions about emerging findings and evidence will take place at keep-in-touch meetings throughout fieldwork.

Updated the section on placing children in unregistered provision to make it clearer how inspectors will evaluate use of this unlawful provision and the local authority's work to stop this practice.

Added a reminder for the local authority to share their action plan with DfE (see Action plan after an inspection/visit section).

Annex A changes:

- 1.16: added an option for the local authority to share data about its implementation of the Families First programme
- 2.05: clarified the scope of this list to recognise that some children may be receiving suitable education outside of a school
- 3.17: added more detail to the request for information about the local authority's use of unregistered provision
- 3.21: added the local authority offer for kinship carers

We have also amended the child-level data list frequently asked questions (FAQs) tab to include details of common queries and highlight common errors when creating the Annex A lists.

August 2025

Added the head of the foster carer forum to the list of people the social care regulatory inspector will speak to when evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster carers.

Amended the reference to arrangements for monitoring visits, aligning with the area SEND framework.

Added information about the circumstances under which a gathering additional evidence visit would be required.

Emphasised the importance of local authorities sharing their best and most recent information on their social work practice.

April 2025

Additional references to family group decision-making meetings.

Made it clearer that our evaluation of the experiences of care leavers includes disabled care leavers.

Added references to evaluating practice where there is a plan for children to leave a secure setting or custody.

The first page of our inspection reports will now include information on contextual issues specific to the local authority.

Added references to the children's social care: national framework throughout the evaluation criteria. We will also link areas for improvement in our reports and focused visit letters to the children's social care: national framework.

Amended the description of child-level data list 10 (adoption) to make it clearer which children should be included.

Amended the request for children's case file documents to make it easier for inspectors to evaluate the effectiveness of local authority auditing.

Annex A item 2.08 includes interim supervision orders.

Annex A item 3.18 (deprivation of liberty orders) now specifies that the list should cover the 6 months before the inspection and include information on the type of accommodation.

December 2024

Reviewed and expanded guidance on when we may carry out a standard inspection in a local authority previously judged good or outstanding.

Added a new request for the local authority to share information about its service structure along with its self-evaluation.

Redrafted the bullet point setting out the care leavers who are in scope of the framework to make this clearer and make sure it aligns with our request for data in Annex A (child-level data list 9).

Added information about when we may put extra resources toward a short inspection.

Updated guidance on how inspectors will prioritise their lines of enquiry on a short inspection.

Redrafted the section on evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster and adoptive carers to make the contribution of the SCRI and our information request clearer. We also redrafted the section on how ILACS takes account of regional adoption agency arrangements to make our guidance clearer and added new guidance in relation to fostering recruitment hubs . There is a new request in Annex A for information about adoption support (item 3.20).

In the evaluation criteria for help and protection, changed 'family group conferences' to 'family group decision-making meetings'.

Added guidance on how inspectors will evaluate practice when a child is placed in unregistered provision. References to 'unregistered children's homes' in the framework have been changed to 'unregistered provision' to reflect that this may include unregistered children's homes and unregistered supported accommodation . There is a new request in Annex A relating to the use of unregistered provision (item 3.19).

New request for information in Annex A: 2.08.

April 2024

Clarification that inspectors will take appropriate action to comply with Ofsted's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Changes to align the language in ILACS with the [children's social care: national framework](#). See the following evaluation criteria:

- in the help and protection judgement
- 'Participation and direct work with children and families' renamed 'Engagement and direct work with children and families', and added references to family networks and supporting children to share their wishes and feelings
- Under 'identifying and responding to all types of abuse and recognising the vulnerability of specific groups of children' we have added reference to educational attendance as a protective factor
- in the children in care judgement, we have added references to family networks under:
 - Making good decisions for children
 - Engagement and direct work with children in care and their families
 - Stability and permanence
- in the impact of leaders judgement:
 - Under 'strategic leadership' we have added more detail on corporate parenting and working with local partners
 - Under 'workforce' we have removed reference to the national assessment and accreditation system (NAAS) and added reference to early career social workers

Updated references to Ofsted's policies on deferring or pausing an inspection and gathering additional evidence. These policies are now set out in a [single publication on the gov.uk website](#).

Changes to reflect Ofsted's updated complaints policy and arrangements for publishing reports.

Clarified how inspectors evaluate a local authority's adoption functions when they are carried out through a regional adoption agency.

Amended arrangements for sharing information with other inspectorates to state that we may also write to the chair of the local safeguarding partnership.

Added a request to Annex A (item 1.15) for local protocols for assessment and support (as set out in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#)).

February 2024

Added further guidance about deferring an inspection or visit.

Added guidance about inspector conduct

Added arrangements for supporting the well-being of staff and leaders during inspections and visits.

Added guidance on when and how the local authority can raise issues, concerns or complaints about an inspection or visit.

Added guidance on attendance and KIT and feedback meetings.

January 2024

Added references to kinship care in the scope, focused visit topics and evaluation criteria.

Added references to young carers in the scope and evaluation criteria and a request for information about them to Annex A (item 2.07).

Additional guidance on notifying a local authority of a focused visit.

Amended guidance on determining the scope of a focused visit looking at the experiences of care leavers.

Amended guidance about how inspectors will evaluate local authority audits and the case file documents inspectors will request.

Added a request to Annex A for information about 16- or 17-year-olds who have presented as homeless (item 2.06).

August 2023

Clarified arrangements for discussions between Ofsted's analytical officer and LA data teams about Annex A.

April 2023

Clarified the potential scope of a focused visit looking at the experiences of care leavers.

Changed a focused visit topic from 'children placed in unregulated and unregistered settings' to 'placement decision making for older children'.

References to 'unregistered and unregulated provision' changed to supported accommodation and unregistered children's homes throughout the framework. This includes in Annex A for item 3.17 under the 'information the local authority uses to manage its services'.

Corrected how the notice period for a monitoring visit is worked out so that this is consistent with the rest of the framework. From the date of notification, fieldwork for monitoring visits will start on day 10.

If a local authority is judged inadequate or requires improvement to be good, inspectors will offer the DCS an opportunity to discuss their action plan responding to the findings.

Clarified the guidance about the number of audits inspectors will look at on focused visits and inspections.

December 2022

Added a separate judgement and evaluation criteria on 'the experiences and progress of care leavers', for implementation from January 2023. As a result of this, we have also:

- removed references to care leavers from the judgement on 'the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers'. From January 2023 this judgement will be on 'the experiences and progress of children in care'
- added 'effective organisational support for the training and professional development of personal advisers' to the evaluation criteria for the judgement on 'the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families'

- added guidance for making the new judgement on a short inspection
- updated the request for 'information the local authority uses to manage its services' set out in Annex A to make it clear which items apply to care leavers and children in care
- updated Annex A item 1.09 to include personal advisers and item 3.15 to include support for 'staying put'.

We have also made updates not related to the new judgement. We have:

- made clear that 16- and 17-year-olds subject to a joint accommodation assessment are in the scope of the inspection
- made clear that when evaluating the experiences and progress of individual children, inspectors will consider the extent to which the local authority complies with the relevant legal duties as set out in the [Equality Act 2010](#)
- updated our request for information about the local authority's use of unregulated provision (Annex A item 3.17). This now covers the 6 months before the inspection.

September 2022

Added guidance for inspectors to discuss Ofsted's guidance on conduct during inspections with the local authority.

August 2022

Amended guidance to make clear that we will confirm the month of a monitoring visit in advance, not the specific dates of fieldwork.

Added guidance about when inspectors speak with local authority staff confidentially.

April 2022

Made clear that areas for priority action can be given in relation to services for care leavers

Added guidance about when inspectors may ask to read children's case files before speaking to them

Amended item 2.02 in Annex A to cover criminal as well as sexual exploitation.

Rephrased item 3.18 in Annex A to make the request about deprivation of liberty orders clearer.

December 2021

Added paragraph numbers to help readers more easily reference the guidance.

Removed references to inspections and focused visits having an extended notice period to enable remote fieldwork arrangements.

Added more flexibility on the days of the week that focused visits and monitoring visits can take place.

Added guidance to make clear that inspectors can be flexible about when they speak to children and families during inspections and visits.

Added a new request to Annex A: a list of all children placed under the inherent jurisdiction of the high court, including children subject to a deprivation of liberty order its services (item 3.18).

August 2021

Deleted the guidance on ILACS focused visits during the restart of routine inspection. This guidance covered the period from September 2020 to May 2021 when we suspended our usual arrangements because of COVID-19.

Amended guidance to allow for fieldwork to be carried out remotely when this is required and possible.

Increased the number of fieldwork days for the education HMI on standard and short inspections from 1 to 2 days.

Added a new topic for focused visits: children placed in unregulated and unregistered settings.

March 2021

The updates in March 2021 include changes to the order of some sections in the framework. If you have previously downloaded a copy of the framework, we recommend you delete these copies to ensure that you are referring to the most up-to-date guidance.

Notification periods for inspections and visits may be extended to 10 working days if fieldwork is likely to include remote activities due to the impact of COVID-19.

Updated guidance on arrangements for publishing inspection reports and letters and concerns and complaints about an inspection to reflect Ofsted's new timescales, arrangements and guidance for these activities.

Updated guidance on how our inspections and visits consider the local authority's arrangements with regional adoption agencies (RAAs).

December 2020

Changes made to the guidance on ILACS focused visits during the restart of routine inspection:

- fieldwork changed from 3 days to 2 days. Fieldwork can start on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday (see the section called 'focused visit arrangements')
- inspectors will consider edge of care/pre-proceedings as part of the scope for help and protection rather than children in care (see the section called 'scope')
- more detailed guidance on the Annex A request for these visits. This request is based on our usual Annex A for ILACS. However, we have added narrower descriptions of the items to reflect the specific focus of these visits (see the section called 'off-site evaluation')

September 2020

Updated the spreadsheet 'Child-level data: additional guidance and template for Annex A' in line with changes by DfE to their annual data returns

Changes made to the guidance on ILACS focused visits during the restart of routine inspection:

- additional guidance on when inspectors will raise an area for priority action (see the section called 'letter of findings')
- Annex A items 1.06 and 3.17 added to the information request. Both items were referred to in the text but were missing from the table (see the section called 'off-site evaluation')

August 2020

Added a new section called 'Guidance on ILACS focused visits during the restart of routine inspection'. This sets out focused visit arrangements that take account of the impact of COVID-19.

The section on 'Engaging with leaders and staff' has new guidance on lines of accountability. It sets out what inspectors may ask if the DCS or lead member are responsible for other functions in the local authority.

Converted the framework from Microsoft Word and PDF versions to an HTML webpage. The presentation of the guidance has changed but not the content or methodology of ILACS.

Footnotes have been moved into the main text of the framework. This includes footnotes in the evaluation criteria. This has not changed our description of the features of a good service or good experiences and progress for children.

Annexes have been turned into sections in the main body of the framework or have moved to their own pages. Annex A still appears in the guidance; it is the last section in the framework, after the new guidance on ILACS focused visits during the restart of routine inspection.

December 2019

In the section on focused visit topics, we've made clear that focused visits:

- about children in care will consider children in unregulated and/or unregistered provision
- about care leavers will consider the quality and suitability of accommodation

In the section on monitoring visits: added an approximate timetable for activities after an inadequate judgement to help make the timescales clearer.

In the care leavers and transitions section of the evaluation criteria: provided additional clarity about what inspectors look for when young people live in unregulated settings.

In the Annex A request for the impact of leadership: added a new request for rapid reviews carried out following child safeguarding incident notifications.

August 2019

Clarified arrangements for sharing provisional judgements at the end of the inspection.

Added a new request to Annex A for information about the local authority's use of unregulated provision.

Changes to the presentation and layout of tables and charts to improve the accessibility of the framework.

April 2019

For standard and short inspections, the set-up discussion on the notification day can happen in person if it is practical for the lead inspector and DCS to do so.

Annex A: Child-level data lists: the guidance and request has been changed to align more closely with existing data submissions. The Excel spreadsheet with detailed guidance has been updated and published with this framework.

Annex A: Information the local authority uses to manage its services:

- Amended items: 1.09, 2.02, 2.04 and 3.07
- New items: 3.13, 3.14, 3.15 and 3.16

December 2018

Updated arrangements for monitoring visits to inadequate local authorities to provide more flexible and proportionate timing.

Redrafted guidance on recording evidence to reflect new recording tools.

Added new guidance for inspectors when inspecting a local authority being reviewed and/or supported by a children's services commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State for Education.

Added a request for the local authority to share an early draft of its action plan following an area for priority action at a focused visit.

A new footnote in Annex A that adds some flexibility in sharing child-level data.

Additional guidance in Annex A on the information inspectors request about children who are electively home educated.

September 2018

We will no longer carry out re-inspections of inadequate local authorities using the

single inspection framework. We will re-inspect using a standard inspection under this framework.

Added a reference to our new privacy notices.

Introduced additional moderation for focused visit letters that identify an area for priority action.

New guidance on producing an action plan after giving an area for priority action on a focused visit.

Clarified our arrangements for a summary report for children and young people after standard and short inspections.

In Annex A, 2 items were numbered 3.04 in the list of 'Information the local authority uses to manage its services'. We corrected this, which also affects the numbering of subsequent documents in this list.

February 2018

Added guidance for inspecting local authorities that are part of a regional adoption agency.

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