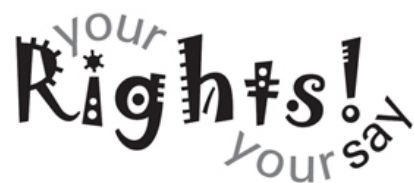




Children's views on the publication of children's homes inspection reports

A report for Ofsted
by the Children's Rights Director

September 2008



Introduction

By law, one of my duties is to ask children and young people for their views. This includes children who live in children's homes. Because I do this independently from Ofsted, I agreed to help find out what children living in children's homes thought about Ofsted's proposals to publish its inspection reports about children's homes on its website. Ofsted will then take what the children said into account when it reaches its final decision about whether or not to put those reports on the internet.

I am grateful to the members of my own team who worked on this report, setting up the web survey and analysing the results for this report, and to my colleagues in the Children's Directorate at Ofsted for their work in collecting the information and entering the data from children who had sent in their answers on paper rather than by computer.

I am also grateful to all the children and young people who took the trouble to send in their views.

All our children's views reports are published for everyone to read. This report is being published on our children's rights website www.rights4me.org.

Roger Morgan
Children's Rights Director for England

Background

After inspectors from Ofsted have inspected a children's home, they write a report of their findings. A copy of this report must by law be given to anyone who specifically asks for one. However, copies of children's homes reports are not at present put on the Ofsted website for everyone to read. This is to help keep children safe from people who might wish to contact children in children's homes for the wrong reasons, or who want to find the home a particular child might be living in.

Ofsted puts all its other inspection reports about children's social care services in its website. It is considering whether to put its children's homes reports on the website in the future, as well as all these other reports. Doing this would mean that councils, parents and other people could easily get information they need about children's homes. Publishing how well each home is doing might also encourage all children's homes to improve how they look after children.

Ofsted has asked for people's views about whether or not it should in future put children's homes reports on its website, and if it does, whether it should take any particular steps to keep children safe (for example, not putting reports on the web about homes where only one, two or three children live).

Ofsted has asked people generally to send in their views through its website, and asked the Children's Rights Director to help find out what children in children's homes think about the idea. To do this, we invited children to give their views through a web survey on our children's rights website. The Children's Directorate of Ofsted sent out invitations to the children in all children's homes in England, asking any child who wanted to have their say to send their views to us through our children's website. They gave a password and log in code for children to do this. If children preferred, or they did not have access to the internet, they could ask for a paper copy of the survey and send that back to us. The results were analysed by the children's rights team. This report, written independently by the children's rights team, gives the children's views.

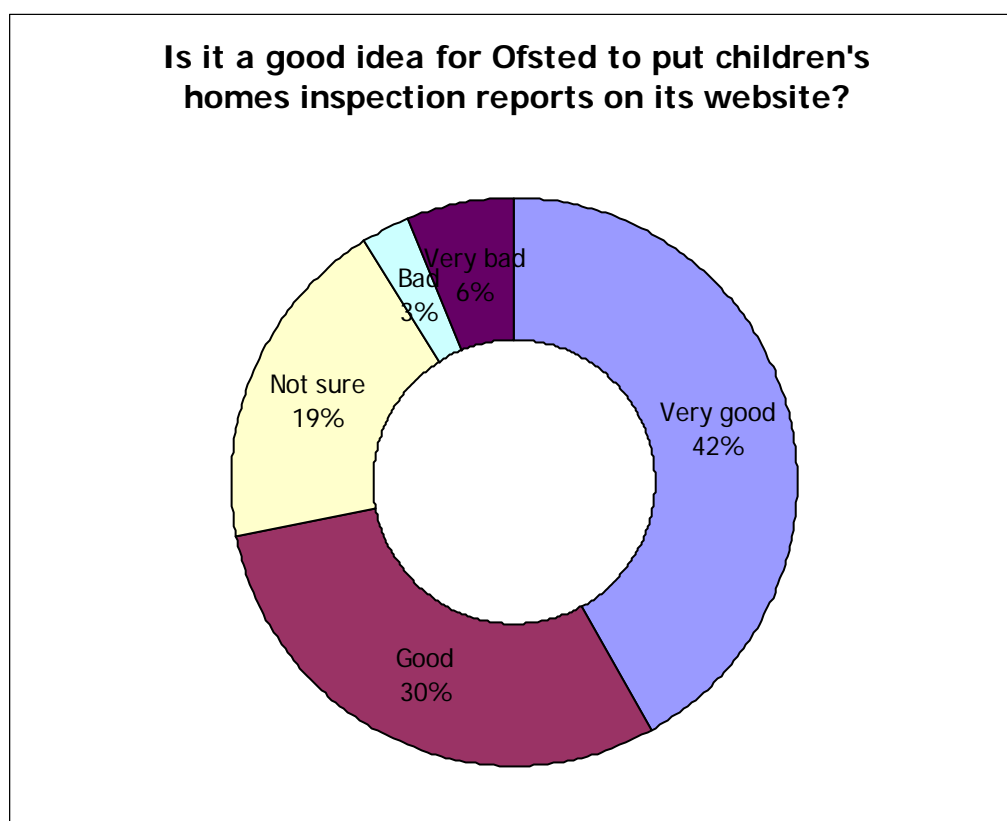
The children who gave their views

Altogether, 278 children and young people sent in their views. Of those who filled in information about themselves (as the very large majority did), 61% were boys and 39% were girls, 83% said they were white, 9% said they had a mixed background, 5% said they were black, and 4% said they were Asian. 21% told us they had a disability. The 248 children who told us how long they had lived in children's homes had spent an average of 2 years in children's homes. 15 of the children had spent over 10 years living in children's homes.

The very large majority told us whether they lived in a children's home with up to three children, or over three children. 78% (200 children) lived in larger homes, with more than three resident children. The other 22%, (56 children) lived in small children's homes where only one, two or three children lived.

Is it a good or bad idea for Ofsted to put children's homes reports on its website?

Overall, a large majority of children were in favour of Ofsted putting children's homes inspection reports on its website. 72% of all the children said this was either a 'good' or a 'very good' idea, and only 9% that it was a 'bad' or 'very bad' idea.



When we compared the answers from children living in small homes with those living in larger homes, the percentages in favour of publishing inspection reports on the web were almost the same (70% of those in small homes, and 73% in larger homes). But those in larger homes were keener on the idea; 44% of children living in larger homes thought it was a 'very good' idea, compared to 32% of those living in small homes.

Children gave the following main reasons in favour of putting children's homes reports on the web (the percentages are of the 140 children who gave us their reasons for saying that putting reports on the web was "good" or "very good"):

So everyone can see what the home is like and how children are being looked after (37%)

To show children's views about children's homes (14%)

To compare homes when choosing one (13%)

So that children can read what the home is like before moving there (13%)

So that people generally can see what being in care is like (11%).

Some quotations from children illustrate these views: "we can then read the report for ourselves and make sure our voice is heard"; "so the public know the homes are being run correctly"; "so that children will be able to view the homes and have a look how they operate before they go there"; "it will give everyone a chance to read them and compare them to their own"; "it's a good idea because some people don't really know much about children's homes and it would give them an idea how they run".

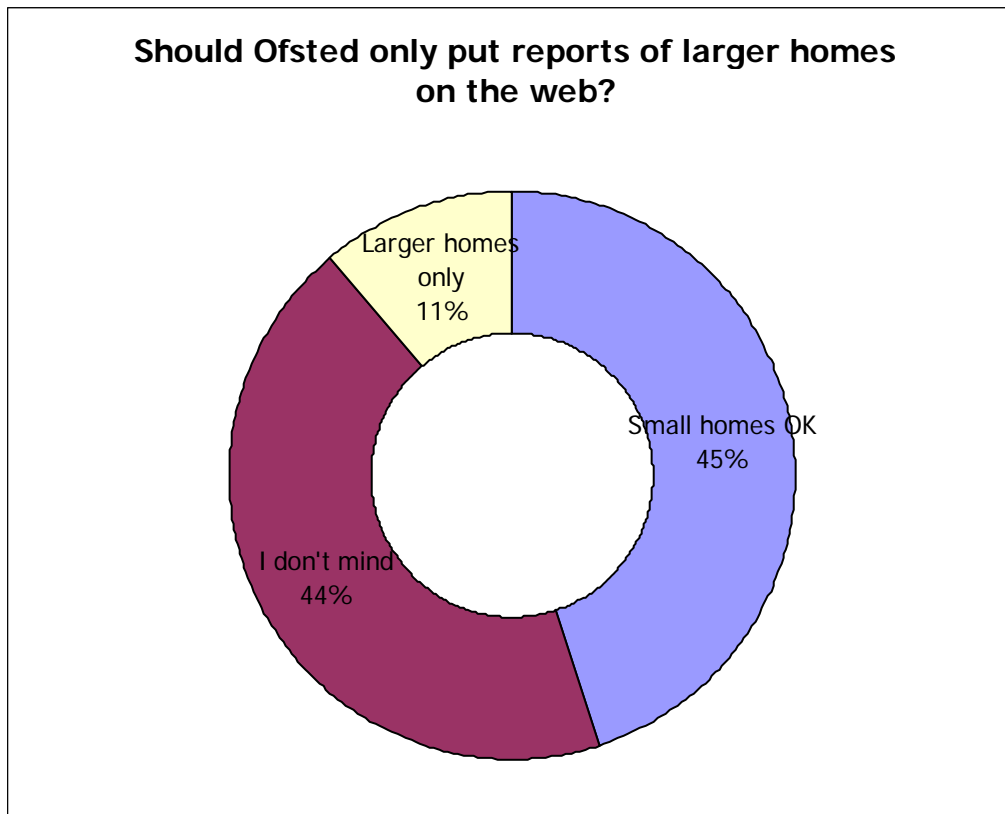
19 children gave reasons against putting children's homes reports on the web. The most common (from 12 children) was that putting reports of their homes on the internet would break their personal confidentiality. Two quotations from children illustrate this view: "I think it is bad because my home is my home and I like my home to stay a home if the Ofsted was able to be viewed by the public it is not my home. A home is a private place so why should it be any different to children in care"; "our lives should be private and like ordinary people our lives should be private as well".

Three children wrote that they were against putting children's homes reports on the internet for safety reasons. One wrote "it should not be available to people with an unhealthy interest in children", while another simply wrote "because of paedophiles". Five others wrote that they were not sure about the idea of putting reports on the web because that could sometimes put some children in danger. One said "people might misuse information to find out where children live if they're not allowed to".

Should Ofsted only put reports about larger homes (with more than three children) on its website?

We asked whether, if Ofsted does decide to put children's homes inspection reports on its website, it should only put reports about larger homes, with more than three children, on the web, but not reports about small homes for one, two or three children.

Only 11% of children said that Ofsted should only put reports about larger homes on the web. Overall, 45% of children thought that if Ofsted does put reports on the internet, it should definitely put reports about small homes with three or fewer children on the website, as well as reports about larger homes. The rest said they didn't mind either way.



There was little difference in the views of those living in small homes and those in larger homes on the question of whether reports of smaller homes should be put on the website. 48% of those in smaller homes were in favour of reports on their homes being put on the website, compared with 43% of those in larger homes who thought reports of smaller homes should be put on the website. Only 6% of children in small homes told us that Ofsted should only put reports about larger homes on its website (13% of those living in larger homes said this).

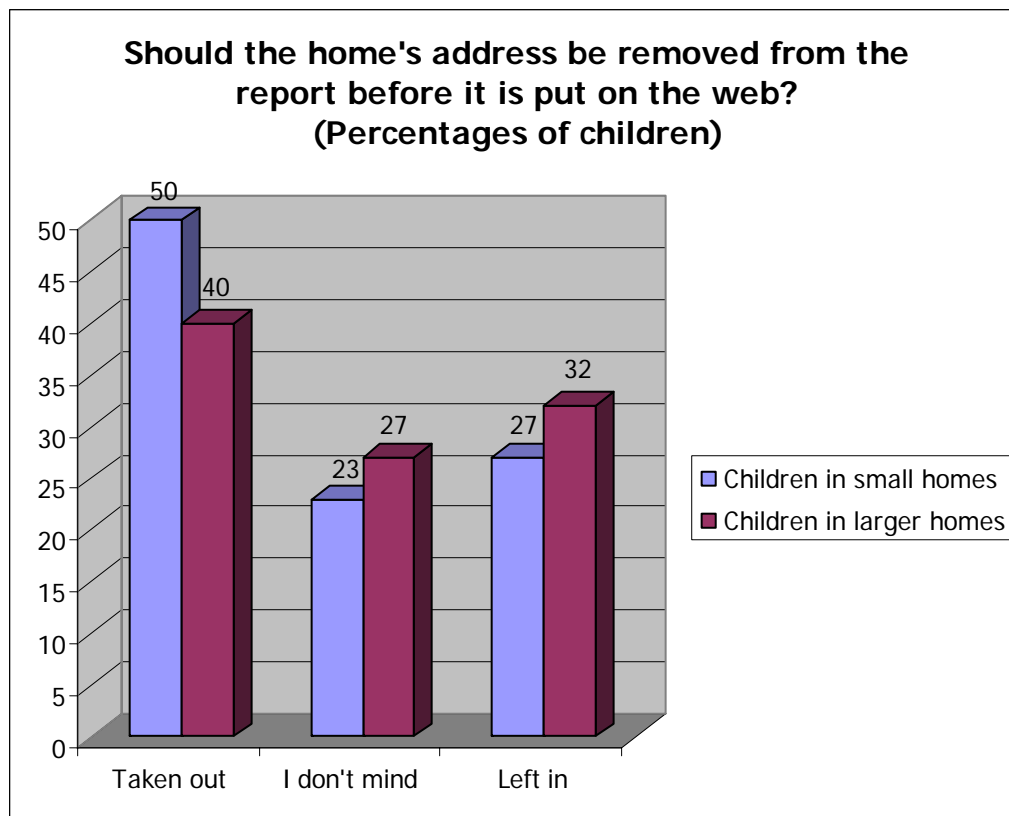
21 children in small homes gave us their reasons for supporting reports of small homes being put on the website. 16 of these said that they thought it was important that people should know about small homes and be able to see what they are like: "so you can see everything that's on offer"; "if the small homes don't get mentioned people will get the wrong picture. It's like a jigsaw, if any of the pieces of a jigsaw are left out you don't see the full picture".

One young person said that small homes should not be left off the internet “because every child matters”, including those in small homes, and another also remembered the slogan “every child matters”, and said that when talking about reports on small and large homes “all the homes matter”.

If Ofsted does put children’s homes reports on the website, should the address of the home be taken out or left in?

Overall, 42% of the 265 children who answered this question wanted Ofsted to take out the address of the home before putting its report on the website. 32% thought the address should be left in, and the rest didn’t mind either way.

This time, there was a bigger difference (ten percentage points) between children living in small homes and those living in larger homes. Half the children in small homes (50%) wanted Ofsted to take the address out of the report, compared with 40% of those in larger homes who wanted this.



93 children gave us their reasons for saying that the address should be taken out of any children’s home report put on the website. 65 of these children wanted the address taken out to keep them safe. 28 wanted the address taken out to help keep details of their home life confidential. Samples of

quotations illustrating children's concerns about safety are: "because paedophiles might enter the site and find out where young people live"; "it could be dangerous and make me feel uncomfortable"; "for the safety of the children and also the staff"; "because you get people that should not know the address, maybe a relative or someone that's not appropriate for the young person so giving them the address is a bad idea".

52 of the children who wanted the address of the home left in if the report was put on the website gave us their reasons for this. The most usual reason, given by 25 children, was that the address had to be there so that readers would know which children's home they were reading about. This was important for people such as social workers ("if the social worker thinks that the child needs a children's home they can tell whether it is a good place or not") and for children themselves ("if someone has been told they are going to a certain one they can look it up about the place"). Some of those who told us that they didn't mind either way about whether the address was left in or taken out, said that this was because they were unsure of what might happen: "I'm all about new ideas and don't really know what the affects would be with or without".

Stopping reports being misused

We asked children whether they had any suggestions of things that Ofsted should do to make sure that children's homes reports that appear on their website do not get misused. 133 children made suggestions. The three top suggestions were:

Make sure reports always protect the identity of individuals (39 children)

Use password protection to restrict access to children's home reports (39 children)

Restrict access to children's home reports to particular groups of people (eg social workers) (19 children).

One young person summed up the proposals this way: "keep confidentiality and to input a username and password and not to supply any personal information that could/can be misused".

From the comments made, it was clear that some feared that children's homes reports might identify individual children, or might have photographs in them which could show children in the home. Although reports do not do either of these things, these comments merit a reassurance to children that their identities and photographs would never be included in inspection reports on the web.

Final messages

We invited children to give us any further messages to Ofsted about the idea of putting children's homes reports on the web. Here is a selection showing the range of messages we received:

"be careful what you say as many things may offend others"

"make sure the reports can't be changed"

"let the children know if the reports get put on the website"

"some of these homes are doing a great job taking care of children and should be highlighted"

"Please put them on the website! I'm dying to read the report about where I live"

"putting reports of the homes are a good idea, but it could be a bad one as well"

"its OK but it could be a little to dangerous"

"just hope they do not get into the wrong hands"

"kudos to Ofsted for this well meaning project"

"ofsted is a good idea, I don't know why people would want to read ofsted reports tho!"

"make sure they are secure, monitored"

"people could look at them and start takin the mickey out of the people who are in care"

"I found these questions difficult because on the one hand I want people to have information but on the other I want to be safe"

"don't put them on there. If there's too much of a risk, whats the point in risking it?"

"I trust you will make the right decision".

Conclusion

From the children's responses, there was overall support for Ofsted to put children's homes inspection reports on the web. Few children, in either large or small homes, thought that Ofsted should only put reports of larger homes on the web. There was however support, from half the children living in small homes, for Ofsted to remove the address of the children's home before publishing its report on the web.

APPENDIX

Survey monitoring report

At the end of the web survey, children were asked to comment on the survey itself.

Of 270 children who responded, 49% found the survey 'easy', 39% found it 'OK' and 12% found it 'hard'.

Of 265 who responded to the question, 77% said they would fill in more surveys about Ofsted's work if they were asked.

Written views about the survey itself varied from praise for tick boxes and layout, to comments that it was boring and not child friendly enough: "we're kids, we like colour and informality!".

The following quotations illustrate the range of comments about this survey and the possibility of others from Ofsted:

"thank you for asking what I think"

"please could you take my opinion serious"

"this survey was good but Ofsted should do a survey about how well young people think the children's homes are and how we are finding it"

"will not be interested in filling anything out like this again"

"it was too short and didn't get me out of lessons long enough so next time make them longer but apart from that it was kush".