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Guidance

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

Updated 8 September 2023

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 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-strategy-2017-to-2022\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-strategy-2017-to-2022) 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

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 adoption support agencies, voluntary adoption agencies and residential family centres also look at, as appropriate, the experiences of adult service users.

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.

Making judgements in a multi-building children's home

We make one overall judgement that covers the registered children's home. This takes into account the experiences and progress of children in each of the home's buildings. This means that shortfalls in care for children in one building will affect the home's overall inspection 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 and impact of the care and support provided 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 inspector judges 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, carers and children and their parents
- the experience of and progress children make in relation to their health, education, and emotional, social and psychological well-being
- 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 children are prepared for their futures and how well transitions are managed
- how well the home ensures that the needs of children who live far from their home area are met

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 have a range of positive experiences, which leads to progress.

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 where it may not be possible to act on their wishes and where 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 attend school or other educational provision. They are learning and are making good progress, taking account of their starting points. Staff are ambitious for children and support children to attend and do well in their education. There is effective liaison with schools, colleges and virtual school heads. Where children are excluded, have no school place or attend school on a part-time basis, staff support educational activity throughout the day and advocate for a return to full-time education as soon as possible.

Children's rights are respected and promoted. Irrespective of any disability they may have, children enjoy access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities, including activities in the local community. They are able to participate in after-school activities, community-based activities, school trips and holidays. 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 challenges the responsible placing authority when staff have concerns about the future plans for children's individual plans, including the timing of leaving care.

Children are in good health or are being helped to improve their health or to manage lifelong conditions. Their health needs (including their mental and sexual health needs, as appropriate) are identified and addressed. They have access to local health services when they need them. The manager's arrangements for managing medication or children's complex health needs are safe and effective and promote independence wherever possible. Staff develop effective relationships with health professionals to promote good health.

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. Where 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 always welcomed sensitively and with the best possible planning. When children are admitted in an emergency, staff do all they can before the move to address any anxieties that children may have about moving to a new home without preparation. When children leave the home, staff always promote positive endings and help them to build their 'life story'. When endings are unplanned, the welfare and well-being of children remain paramount, and staff always act 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 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 children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children so that they receive positive experiences and make good progress. There are no serious 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 their welfare is not 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 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 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. There are examples of excellent practice that are worthy of wider dissemination.

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.

In short break services, exceptional consistent care adds considerably to children's experiences, progress and development; this is achieved through the provision of a wide range of additional experiences and care, including interaction with their peers, opportunities to develop their independence and being able to participate in local community provision.

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 may go missing 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
- 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 from 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 and

their family, if this is appropriate and in accordance with plans for their future.

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, going missing, 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 go missing experience well-coordinated responses that reduce actual harm or risk of harm to them. There is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect children and to reduce further harm or the risk of harm. Staff understand the risks. They are proactive and effective in helping and protecting children. They revise their ways of working if their approach is not working.

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 where the child has been or is missing, where this is appropriate and relevant to the plans for that child's future care. Staff look for children when they are missing.

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.

Any use of restraint or restrictive practice is 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 their 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. Where the setting is not satisfied with the response from either the local authority where the setting 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 updated and comply with statutory requirements.

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 and they are unlikely to be missing from the home on a regular basis. 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
- 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 where 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 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
- for multi-building children's homes, whether the manager has effective oversight across all of the buildings within the home's registration and ensures that decisions are always made in children's best interests

Good

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

The home is managed effectively and efficiently 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 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 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 and to develop a sense of belonging, security and purpose.

If children are not settling into the home, leaders and managers ensure that children's plans are reviewed promptly with the placing authority and the family (where this is appropriate). They consider the best steps to take next, including, for example, whether any additional support might be necessary to keep children safe. Leaders and managers challenge effectively and take action when they are concerned that placing authorities are making decisions that are not in children's best interests or when the statutory requirements for looked after children are not met.

Leaders and managers understand the plans for the children and drive the achievement of important milestones, goals and permanence for their futures. 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 maintained to a high standard, meets the needs of the children and feels and looks like a family home for children. 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. The records 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 in the community, taking advice and guidance from local partners and agencies.

In short break services, there are effective relationships with parents or carers so that they feel confident leaving their child for their stay and they understand what the service can offer. Parents feel involved in the running of the service and they are able to raise concerns and complaints. Staff are accessible and keep parents informed about their child's stay at the home.

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 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. They have high expectations of their staff to change and improve the lives of the children they are responsible for.

Leaders and managers 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 and schools that ensure the best possible care, experiences and futures for children.

Legal context

Under the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents)

(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents>), 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 that 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).

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

- the [Care Standards Act 2000](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents>)
- the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>)
- the [Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide>)
- other statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE)

The regulations, the government guide and the SCCIF

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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide>) (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](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>).

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

Types of inspection

We carry out 3 different types of inspection of 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. The inspector will normally be on site for up to 2 days.

Assurance inspections

When we judge a home requires improvement to be good at its full inspection, we usually inspect it again in the same inspection period (1 April to 31 March). This second inspection will usually be an assurance inspection.

If a home is judged requires improvement to be good or inadequate in the last quarter of the inspection period (between 1 January and 31 March), the regulations do not require us to complete the second inspection in that inspection year. If we do not complete the second inspection in the same

inspection year, the full inspection must take place before 30 June in the next inspection period.

When we judge a home good or outstanding at its full inspection, we do not usually carry out another inspection in that same inspection period. However, we may decide to carry out another inspection if we receive concerns about a home or we are concerned about the management arrangements. A second inspection would usually be an assurance inspection unless, exceptionally, the criteria for a [monitoring visit](#) are met.

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

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

Monitoring inspections

We may also carry out monitoring inspections:

- 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

Notice of inspection

All inspections of children's homes are unannounced.

We ask homes to give the inspector access to premises and records and space for the inspector to work. The inspector may need some help to navigate the system where records are electronic.

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

Request for information at a full inspection

At the start of the inspection, inspectors give the provider a link to the electronic version of [Annex A \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-inspection-documents\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-inspection-documents) of the inspection framework and agree when the information will be 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 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/section/31\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/section/31). 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 or criminal exploitation or extremism, all agencies including the relevant local authorities are working together to support the child
- return home interviews are being offered by the placing authority when children have been missing from the home
- children are receiving the educational provision as outlined in their relevant plan
- 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 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/regulation/32/made\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/regulation/32/made)

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, the inspector should evaluate the action the manager has taken. Inspectors must inform the relevant Senior His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) of any placing authorities that have not offered and then arranged a return home interview for any child who has been missing from the home (without good reason) 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

Frequency of inspections

Children's homes normally receive a full inspection at least once annually. Depending on the outcome of the full inspection, the home may be inspected further in the year – see the [Types of inspection section](#) for further details.

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
- notifications
- monitoring reports given to Ofsted by children's homes under regulations 44 and 45 of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>)

Newly registered children's homes that register between 1 April and 30 September in any given year receive at least one inspection between 1 October and 31 March. Those that register between 1 October and 31 March in any given year will receive their first inspection between 1 April and 30 September of the following inspection year.

Newly registered children's homes are required to tell us when the first child arrives to stay. This will help us to arrange an appropriate first inspection date.

If we receive concerning information about a newly registered children's home, we may inspect earlier than the regulations require. This inspection will usually be a full or an assurance inspection.

If a manager leaves the home before its first inspection, the first full inspection will usually be carried out within 4 weeks of the notification. Inspectors may carry out inspection activity at night or at weekends if we receive information that indicates that this is necessary in order to safeguard children, or if we receive information of concern relating to staffing or practice at night or at weekends.

Where possible, the same inspector 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 inspector until the enforcement action has finished.

Length of inspection

Children's homes are usually inspected by a single social care inspector. If the children's home provides education or is also registered with the DfE as a school, an HMI (education) inspects the educational provision.

For a full inspection of a children's home, an inspector usually spends a maximum of 2 days on site.

For a full inspection of a multi-building children's home, the inspector usually spends up to 4 days on site visiting each of the buildings that make up the registration. The exact number of days will depend on the number of buildings.

For a full inspection of a residential special school which is also registered as a children's home, the inspector will usually spend up to 3 days on site, depending on the size of the home.

For assurance inspections, the inspector is usually on site for a maximum of 1 day. For assurance inspections of multi-building children's homes, the inspector is usually on site for up to 2 days visiting each of the buildings that make up the registration.

The inspector and the regulatory inspection manager (RIM) should decide how best to allocate resources for inspections. In some circumstances, it may be necessary for more inspectors to be involved in the inspection. The nature of some inspections, such as those of residential special schools that are also registered as children's homes or those of multi-building children's homes, may require extra inspector time on site to:

- consider carefully the issues relating to the evaluation criteria that are specific to that provision
- find opportunities to talk to staff who directly supervise children at all times

Inspectors should determine whether the length of time on site should be reduced in certain circumstances, such as for inspections of homes with a very small number of children. To do this, they should consider:

- previous inspection judgements, notifications and any serious incidents
- the number of children who live in the home

- the size of the establishment, including the number of separate homes on site

Deferrals

We will grant deferrals in line with our [deferral policy](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/deferring-ofsted-inspections) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/deferring-ofsted-inspections>).

Timeframe

Day	Full inspection activity
1	Preparation
2	Site visit
3	Site visit (for multi-building children's homes, inspectors may spend up to an additional 2 days on site, so until day 4 or 5, and for a RSS also registered as a children's home, this would be day 3)
4	Drafting report
5 to 8	Inspection evidence and report submitted for quality assurance
21	Draft report sent to the registered provider for any comments within a maximum of 18 working days from the end of the inspection
26	Provider returns the report within 5 working days with any comments
33	Final report sent to the registered provider within 30 working days of the end of the inspection
38	Provider may submit a formal complaint within 5 working days of the issue of the final report
41	The final report will be published on the Ofsted reports website (https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/) within a maximum of 38 working days from the end of the inspection

Preparing for an inspection

Analysis and planning

Inspectors are allocated 1 day to prepare for a full inspection and 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 goes missing 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

In addition, the inspector should always familiarise themselves with relevant background and contextual information, such as the most recent inspection of the local authority and any linked setting (including possible unregistered schools).

If we have received information that indicates potential non-compliance with regulatory requirements, we may use this as a line of enquiry during a full, assurance or monitoring inspection. The 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 inspector carries out an analysis of the available evidence and information and must record their planning notes on the inspection database.

The plan for the inspection should identify:

- lines of enquiry
- any areas of apparent weakness or significant strength
- areas where further evidence needs to be gathered

Additionally, for multi-building children's homes, the inspector will identify which building they should visit at the start of the inspection. This will be based on any information we receive through reports under regulations 44 and 45, notifications and any complaints or concerns. In making their decision, inspectors should consider which building accommodates the most children, whether any information raises concerns about a specific building and, if known, where the manager is most likely to be. Every building must be visited during the course of the inspection.

The focus of the inspection may change during its course as further evidence emerges.

Questionnaires

Each year, Ofsted uses [online questionnaires](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-care-questionnaires-what-children-and-young-people-told-ofsted) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-care-questionnaires-what-children-and-young-people-told-ofsted>) to gather a range of views about different types of setting. 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 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 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 under regulation 40 and reports under regulations 44 and 45

Inspectors must regularly review notifications, [regulation 44](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/44/made) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/44/made>) reports and [regulation 45](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/45/made) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/45/made>) reports. 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.

If a registered children's home is made up of more than one building, the regulation 44 and regulation 45 reports should cover each of the buildings that make up the registration. A failure to do so is likely to result in [further action](#).

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
- a decision to carry out an assurance inspection of a home judged outstanding or good at its last full inspection and that Ofsted had previously assessed as only requiring 1 full inspection in that year-long inspection period
- 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](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/40/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/40/made>).

[Online forms and further guidance about notifications](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tell-ofsted-about-an-incident-childrens-social-care-notification)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tell-ofsted-about-an-incident-childrens-social-care-notification>) are available. Providers should always seek advice from their link 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.

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

Whenever there are concerns about the safety or welfare of a child, the 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 \(2018\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2>).

If the inspector has any concern about the practice of either the placing or host local authority, this is managed in line with [Ofsted's safeguarding policy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy>). 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 inspector requires an update on the progress of an investigation, the provider must send it via email and not via the notification system.

For multi-building children's homes, providers should make it clear on the notification form which building the incident took place in, or which building the child lives in if the incident relates to a specific child.

Reports under regulations 44 and 45

[Regulation 44](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/44/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/44/made>) requires that an independent person visits the 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 to:

- HMCI
- the local authority for the area in which the home is located, on request
- the placing authorities of children
- the registered provider and, if applicable, the registered manager
- the responsible individual (if one is nominated)

These reports provide crucial information about the safety, welfare and progress of children. 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.

We will monitor the frequency and timeliness of report submission and the overall quality of reports.

It is the responsibility of the independent person to submit the report to HMCI.

We recognise that most providers wish to have sight of, and comment on, the report including the recommendations made by the independent person.

Providers should return the report to the independent person once they have commented on the report and recommendations. The independent person can then decide if they will make any changes to the report to reflect the comments of the provider. The independent person will then send the report to HMCI, through the email address detailed below.

The independent person should notify us if they consider that the provider has attempted to make amendments to the report that are not consistent with their findings or original report.

No alterations or amendments should be made to the report by anyone else, other than the provider's response to the recommendations and summary of the report.

If HMCI has reasonable cause to believe that the reports have been altered or amended by persons other than the independent person, then we will consider further action.

For multi-building children's homes, the independent person must visit each building to ensure that they have a good understanding of the experience of all children living in the home, irrespective of which building they are living in. They should also check that any buildings not in use at the time of the visit remain fit for purpose.

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 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/45/made\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/regulation/45/made) 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.

For multi-building children's homes, the manager should complete one report that must cover all of the buildings that make up the registration. It is for the manager to determine how to construct the report. The manager can split the report into sections relating to each building, if this will assist them in carrying out the analysis of their findings and recommendations for improvement.

The on-site inspection

The start of the inspection

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

The inspector always meets 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 to interview the registered manager during 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 suitable representative
- outline any lines of enquiry for the inspection, including those generated through reading 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 inspector needs to be aware of during the inspection
- ensure that Ofsted holds the correct details on the inspection database, including email address and telephone numbers for the manager, registered provider and/or responsible individual, any other partners, or directors or trustees (see [Annex A \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-inspection-documents\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-inspection-documents))
- 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 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 inspector, if agreed in advance

Additionally, for multi-building children's homes, the inspector will discuss and arrange to visit all the buildings included in the registration over the course of the inspection with the registered manager/person in charge at the beginning of the inspection. If the registered manager/person in charge is not at the first building the inspector visits, they should contact them immediately and arrange to meet with them as soon as practicable.

If the inspection has been prompted by our receiving information about a concern or allegation, the inspector 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 inspector 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, the inspector takes an in-depth look at the quality of the help, care and protection that individual children have experienced. For sampled cases, the inspector looks 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.

In small homes, the inspector tracks the experiences and progress of all children living there. In larger homes, the inspector tracks the experiences and progress of a representative sample of children.

In a multi-building children's home, the inspector will case track at least one child from each building. If any child has moved between buildings in the home, the inspector will always choose their case to track, in order to check whether decisions were made in the child's best interests. They will check that the placing authority, as the corporate parent responsible for the child's care plan, has agreed any moves that the child has made.

The inspector 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 the inspector from the case list provided and may include, where relevant:

- children who have recently moved into the home (or in the case of a service providing short breaks, a child who has recently started using the service)
- children who have recently left the home (whether their move was planned or unplanned)
- any children who have gone missing from the home since the last inspection
- any child at risk of, or subject to, child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation
- any child who lives a considerable distance from their placing authority
- in a short breaks service, a child who is subject to a child protection plan or a child receiving services as a child in need, to see how well the service works with others to help and protect children

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 (unless on leave), using their knowledge of the case, file structure and recording systems.

Case files are only one aspect of tracking the child's journey. The inspector increases 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, the children's guardian, health and education professionals and other practitioners involved in their care. When tracking the case of a looked-after child, the inspector must always consult the independent reviewing officer, the placing social worker and the key worker.

The inspector examines, discusses and evaluates 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.

In multi-building children's homes, the inspector will want to be assured that the multi-building arrangements of the home work well, and that it is operating in

the best interests of children and in line with children's care plans. The inspector will seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the relationships between staff and children and the impact of the manager working across a number of buildings.

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 who live in or stay at the children's home provide important evidence of their experiences and progress.

The inspector assesses how well the children's home consults with children. Children's views that have been gathered by the home are taken into account as part of the inspection evidence.

The inspector always tries to meet with children during the inspection. The inspector 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 where 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.

For multi-building children's homes, the inspector will usually meet with children living in each building to discuss their experiences and progress.

Many of the experiences of children living in the home take place after the normal school, college or working day. The inspector should involve the children in inspection activity whenever they can.

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

- asking children to show inspectors around the premises
- holding structured meetings (as a general guideline, a meeting should not include more than 5 children)
- spending time in the company of staff and children, observing their interactions
- having individual conversations
- joining in leisure activities such as computer or console games

- preparing snacks or drinks
- spending mealtimes with children
- conversations during homework
- outdoor activities

Communication methods

Children can use a range of non-verbal and alternative methods for communicating with their families, other children and the adults who care for them. For example, these methods can include their behaviour and sounds, signs and symbols or a variety of specialist electronic devices, and any combination of these.

Inspectors should bear in mind the limits of verbal consultation with some children, particularly those who are disabled or have complex healthcare needs and consider their specific communication needs. For some children, the inspector may request the assistance of staff 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 the inspector to spend time observing children and how they interact with staff and respond to their environment. Inspectors should discuss with the provider how they gather children's views and give them feedback about any consultation, and, where appropriate, use these systems to talk to children during the inspection.

Inspectors should discuss with staff the individual communication methods used by a child, review any communication/sensory assessments plan and determine if this informs staff's approach and practice throughout the care plan. They will use this knowledge when they observe any interaction between staff and children. Inspectors are particularly interested in the quality of interaction between them – to understand how staff recognise and respond to children's changing needs. For example, they want to know that staff understand when a child may be in distress or pain, confused, or happy and content. How staff use children's own communication methods to respond to them, reassure them and help them to enjoy positive experiences and make progress contributes to the overall inspection judgement.

Inspectors have to balance spending sufficient time observing interaction between staff and children and avoiding causing children distress or confusion because an adult who is unfamiliar to them is upsetting their routines and feelings of security. Inspectors will follow up with staff separately to explore any lines of enquiry arising from their observations.

Some children use a form of sign language, for example Makaton or British Sign Language. An independent trained signer will accompany the inspector if this is necessary. However, some children will use localised signs known only to their community, staff or parents and they may be reluctant to sign to someone who is unfamiliar to them or who does not understand their particular 'accent' or vocabulary.

The inspector can request the services of an interpreter to join the inspection. This is helpful when the children are fluent in British Sign Language. The inspector requests 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 the inspector.

Practice when gathering the views of children

Inspectors demonstrate safe and sensitive practice by:

- telling staff when and where conversations with children are taking place and who is involved
- 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
- ensuring that staff are aware of any arranged meetings with children and that children may leave the meeting at any time
- where appropriate, explaining to that information suggesting that they or another child is at risk of harm will be passed by the inspector 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 is usually through a telephone call during the inspection and may not always take place on site. These professionals may include:

- placing social workers
- independent reviewing officers
- school staff
- local police
- the placing authority's quality assurance officer (or equivalent) and designated officer
- youth offending teams
- monitors from the youth justice board or independent visitors

Inspectors ask for the relevant contact details via [Annex A](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-inspection-documents) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-inspection-documents>).

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

For multi-building children's homes, the inspector will speak to staff who work in each building. This is in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the staffing arrangements and to understand how the arrangements ensure that there is continuity of staff for children.

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

The inspector always asks to interview the responsible individual where:

- 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
- a discussion 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

In multi-building children's homes, the inspector will also discuss with the manager:

- the specific management arrangements to ensure that there is good-quality management oversight across more than one building

- how staffing arrangements are managed across the buildings to provide continuity of care for children
- the plans that are in place to recruit staff safely when they are needed quickly or in an emergency, if not all of the buildings are regularly used

During the inspection, the 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.

The inspector usually meets with the registered person at the end of day 1 to share emerging findings. The inspector normally sets out for the manager what they 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 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.

Assessing financial viability

Regulation 47(1) of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/contents/made>) 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'.

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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-registration-for-childrens-social-care-services) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-registration-for-childrens-social-care-services>).

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](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>)).

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. Where paper or electronic personnel records are maintained at the home, the inspector 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](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>).

If the home uses the [DBS update service](https://www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service) (<https://www.gov.uk/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 inspector may

request that a small sample of full personnel records are made available at the inspection visit.

If 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 home 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 know that 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.

Regulation 46 review of premises

Regulation 46 sets out the requirements for the registered person to review the premises.

There is no set format for location assessments in children's homes. Inspectors should not impose any preference for a style of assessment. Nor should they 'recommend' their preferred model.

For multi-building children's homes, there must be a location assessment for each building.

Managers should update location assessments annually or when there is a change of circumstances, or when the strategies the manager has put in place to reduce or minimise risk are not effective. The annual update will need to be proportionate. Managers will not usually need to carry this out at the same level of the initial assessment.

On inspection, inspectors may check that the provider has assessed whether the location can continue to support the needs of the children placed there. They will evaluate the action taken to address any identified risks. Inspectors should talk with children in the home's care about the quality of life in the area. These conversations should establish whether the children feel safe and how to manage any risks that they identify.

Management of risk

Producing a location assessment, like any other risk assessment, does not in itself keep children safe. Assessment is only one part of any overarching approach to risk management. Risk management is an umbrella term that includes:

- the identification of hazards
- the effects of hazards
- the degree of severity of the incident/issue happening
- the likelihood of the incident/issue happening
- the overall assessment of risk
- broader thinking about how to manage that risk

It is a continuing process of proactively managing risk and minimising hazards.

It is not always straightforward to define a 'safe' area. Whether a location is safe or not can change rapidly and may depend on the vulnerabilities of children. Some individual children may be more at risk because of their particular vulnerabilities.

Some locations and neighbourhoods may change over time and become increasingly unsafe. Inspectors should take a proportionate view when this happens. What is important is that the manager and staff have recognised the changes and have put in place strategies to minimise the risk. This includes taking appropriate action if the risks become unmanageable.

The location assessment is about more than risk and hazards. It is also an assessment of the services available. Providers should review the location assessment to ensure that there are suitable, appropriate and sufficient resources and services to meet the needs of any children currently living in the home or any proposed new child to the home.

Finding evidence of possible offences

If, during the course of the inspection, the inspector thinks that an offence may have been committed, they should contact a social care compliance inspector or RIM 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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-enforcement-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-enforcement-policy>).

Implications of the Equality Act

The [Equality Act 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>) 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

The inspector 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.

The inspector's 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, the inspector can use individuals' initials.

The inspector 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. The inspector 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, the inspector 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

The inspector will give verbal feedback of the main findings and provisional judgements. This feedback will usually be given to the manager, responsible individual (as appropriate). Additional senior staff from the provider may also attend, if agreed in advance with the inspector. In some circumstances, the inspector 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.

The inspector 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 in the [Guide to the regulations and quality standards \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide), providing a clear direction for improvement
- use the grade descriptors and the evidence to clearly indicate how the judgements have been reached
- confirm [when the draft 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.

Feedback to children

Inspectors should give feedback to children, as appropriate to their age and understanding. Inspectors will make efforts to address matters raised by children.

For multi-building children's homes, it may not be possible for the inspector to provide feedback to every child face to face. The inspector will seek to provide feedback to as many of the children as possible, which may be by video call or over the phone.

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.

For multi-building children's homes, the inspector must make clear whether the requirement only applies to a specific building (or buildings) within the home. If the requirement does not apply to all buildings, then this will be indicated by adding the name of the building (or buildings) in brackets after the requirement.

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

Recommendations

Inspectors make recommendations where necessary to improve practice.

In 2015, the DfE published the [Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide>) that explains and supplements the regulations.

The Guide is made under [section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/section/23) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/section/23>). 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.

For multi-building children's homes, the inspector must make clear whether the recommendation only applies to a specific building (or buildings) within the home. If the requirement does not apply to all buildings, then this will be indicated by adding the name of the building (or buildings) in brackets after the recommendation.

Inspectors may also make recommendations in relation to other relevant statutory guidance such as:

- [Working together to safeguard children](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children>)
- [Statutory guidance for children who run away or go missing from home or care](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>)
- [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>)

If, during an inspection, the registered person rectifies a minor administrative error that has minimal impact on the experiences and progress of children, an inspector 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.

If the registered person has failed to comply with a requirement within the timescale set by the inspector, 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 provider has not acted on recommendations made at a previous inspection, the inspector considers 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 the [Care Standards Act 2000](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents>) and associated regulations. The [social care enforcement policy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-enforcement-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-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 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.

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 within the same timescales.

The post-inspection debrief is between the inspector and their manager. It is an opportunity for them to discuss the inspection and the quality of the evidence, and to consider a recommendation for further action to take to the case review. The recommendation of further action should include the scheduling of future inspections and/or compliance action. The [social care enforcement policy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-enforcement-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-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.

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 usually a monitoring visit or a full inspection. If the concerns are serious, we are likely to return to carry out a monitoring visit sooner 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 results in a published report, although regional directors can decide not to publish monitoring reports in exceptional circumstances.

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.

Where 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. All requirements that have been made will have had to be met in full. In these instances, the inspector may determine that an improved inspection judgement can be awarded. If this is the case, the monitoring visit results in a new inspection judgement.

Where 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:

- carry out further monitoring and take steps towards cancellation
- schedule a full inspection (usually within 16 weeks from 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

Feedback to local authorities

Whenever children are at immediate risk, inspectors must follow [Ofsted's safeguarding policy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy>). In addition, whenever a children's home is judged inadequate at the full inspection, 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 because it has a duty to safeguard the welfare of all children living in its area. This also applies when we have judged that a home has 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 region sends an email to the directors of children's services in the relevant local authorities after the case review when we have decided what further action to take. We follow this email up with a telephone call to ensure receipt. When there are a large number of placing authorities, the region should discuss arrangements for contacting them with relevant managers. The inspector should also ensure that the email to local authorities is forwarded to the home.

The inspector gives feedback to the 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 relevant local authorities understand these and can make their own decisions. The inspector must make clear that the home 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 the [social care enforcement policy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-enforcement-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-enforcement-policy>).

We contact placing authorities to follow HMCI's powers detailed in paragraph 8 of schedule 13 of the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents>), '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](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/contents/made)) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/541/contents/made>) 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 parents who have placed their children in the home themselves.

Children's homes that are also independent schools or non-maintained special schools

Inspectors should notify the DfE when we judge children's homes that are registered by the DfE as an independent school, or approved by it as a non-maintained special school, to be inadequate at a full inspection or when we judge them to have serious or widespread concerns at an assurance inspection.

The inspection report

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

In most instances, each inspection judgement section of the report should be no more than 6 to 8 short paragraphs, each usually only 2 or 3 sentences long. Reports for settings that have several weaknesses or that have been judged 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 children's homes inspection reports on our [reports website](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/) (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>) in an anonymised form to protect children. Published inspection reports do not contain any of the following:

- the name of the home
- the address of the home
- any information that identifies the location of the home
- 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 or the Midlands). The reports are not searchable by postcode.

Children's letters

Inspectors write a letter to the children that summarises the inspection findings following every full inspection of a children's home. This will not be published. If children need an adapted form of the letter, it 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 letter. It can be short, include pictures and be set in simple, clear sentences.

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

For multi-building children's homes, the inspector will decide whether to write one letter to all children or different letters to the children living in each building, depending on the individual circumstances.

Quality assurance and arrangements for publishing the report

The inspector is responsible for the quality of the report. The inspector will check the completed draft 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.

Following the inspection, we will ask providers for feedback about the inspection through a post-inspection survey. This is sent to the provider at the same time as when they receive both the draft and final inspection reports. We will use feedback from providers to improve the quality of inspections.

Conduct during inspections

Ofsted's [code of conduct \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conduct-during-ofsted-inspections\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conduct-during-ofsted-inspections) 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.

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 inspector as soon as possible during the inspection visit. This provides an opportunity to resolve the matter before the inspection is completed.

If the provider is unable to resolve the matter with the inspector, they should contact the inspector's RIM for further discussion.

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 has not been possible to resolve concerns, a formal complaint can be raised under [Ofsted's complaints procedure](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted>) before the final inspection report is published.

If the provider wishes to submit a formal complaint, it will have until the end of the fifth working day after receiving the final report to do so.

Assurance inspections

Timeline

The usual timeframe for assurance inspections in working days is:

Day	Assurance inspection activity
1	Preparation/site visit
2	Site visit/drafting report
3 to 7	Inspection evidence and report submitted for quality assurance
20	Draft report sent to the registered provider for any comments within a maximum of 18 working days of the end of the inspection
25	Provider returns the report within 5 working days with any comments
32	Final report sent to the registered provider within 30 working days of the end of the visit
37	Provider may submit a formal complaint within 5 working days of the issue of the final report
40	The final report will be published on the Ofsted reports site (https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/) within a maximum of 38 working days of the end of the inspection

Assurance inspection findings

Assurance inspections will result in a single judgement based on the findings of the inspection. An assurance inspection focuses on whether children are well cared for, whether they are safe, and the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Inspectors are not expected to case track – this is not a full inspection – case sampling is sufficient. The inspector will look at elements of practice within individual sampled cases, usually to follow lines of enquiry.

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 of the impact on children in the following areas:

- the care of children
- the safety of children
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers

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. Inspectors only need to report whether these have been met or not. They do not need to detail the previous requirements and recommendations.
- 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](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/) (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>).

Serious and widespread concerns: next steps

Any serious or widespread concerns will lead to a post-visit debrief between the inspector and their manager 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 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 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](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsted-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

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.

The timing and nature of subsequent inspection and monitoring visits following a judgement of inadequate are set on a case-by-case basis. This should be determined at the case review, but will be between 6 to 8 weeks after the inadequate inspection.

If the concerns are serious, we are likely to return sooner 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.

An inspection or visit takes place sooner if either:

- further significant concerns arise during this period
- the nature of the existing concerns dictates that earlier monitoring is needed

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

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.

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

Monitoring with other statutory agencies

Ofsted is committed to cooperation and joint working with other agencies. Generally, we do not carry out joint visits unless there is good reason to do so. If an inspector believes that a joint visit is required, then they should make representations in favour of the visit, with support from their RIM, to their regional director.

Regional directors should seek a view from the Ofsted legal services team before authorising any joint visit. When carrying out a visit at the same time as another agency, both parties must be clear about their respective roles at the visit. This must be discussed in advance with the representative of the other agency. The inspector must explain to the registered provider, at the outset of the visit with another agency, the respective roles of Ofsted and the other agency or agencies.

In any visit with another agency, our responsibility is to determine whether the provider continues to meet the requirements for registration. The inspector must gather their own evidence to help them reach that decision. The inspector must not take evidence on behalf of the other party or use their evidence instead of collecting our own.

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 the inspector is concerned or unsure about any aspect of the visit, they can contact their RIM 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

Monitoring visit reports

Ofsted will publish all monitoring reports on its [reports website](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/) (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>). In exceptional circumstances, a regional director may decide not to publish a monitoring visit report.

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, alongside any action that Ofsted will be taking to notify 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 where 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, where relevant.

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 the ['Quality assurance and arrangements for publishing the report' section](#)).

Checks on responsible individuals

The [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>) require most 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 [Changes to children's social care services that are registered and/or inspected by Ofsted](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-childrens-social-care-services-that-are-registered-andor-inspected-by-ofsted>).

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 home continues to meet registration requirements. The inspector must use the assurance inspection report template and make the following statement in the report:

“ The home has not provided [accommodation] to [children] since its registration on [insert date of registration]. This inspection focuses on whether the 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 children since the last inspection and intends to admit children within the next 3 months, the inspector, in consultation with their manager, 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 and 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 its 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 home to be exempt from inspection.

We will not routinely 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 any concerns.

The condition should be removed following the visit if 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](#)

(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents>) requires any person who carries on or manages a children's home to be registered with Ofsted. It is a criminal offence to operate or manage a 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 inspector should raise a requirement under regulation 27 of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>). 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 to put in place satisfactory management arrangements will be taken into account when planning and carrying out inspections. For more information, see [Changes to children's social care services that are registered and/or inspected by Ofsted](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-childrens-social-care-services-that-are-registered-and-or-inspected-by-ofsted>).

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 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 we can take, you should refer to the [social care enforcement policy](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-ofsteds-enforcement-policy>).

Inspecting different types of homes

Each home is unique and, although all providers have to meet the requirements of regulations and take into account [the Guide](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide>), there will be different ways that these are shown in different homes and for different groups of children.

Inspectors should use their pre-inspection planning time and the set-up meeting at the beginning of the inspection to understand the ethos and the approach or

model of care used in a particular home.

Inspectors need to take into account the type of home it is and its purpose because this will influence:

- the specific needs of the children who come to live in the home and how these needs are met
- the physical environment
- the nature and extent of children's progress
- the type of experiences that children can expect to have
- the training and development needs for staff
- how, as inspectors, they are able to understand the views and/or experiences of children
- the key stakeholders that they may try to contact

Some schools and children's homes adopt a particular way of working or subscribe to a particular model of practice. It is not expected that inspectors have a detailed knowledge of all the theoretical models or approaches to residential care. However, it is important that they take the home's approach into account and take opportunities to familiarise themselves with the principles of it whenever possible.

Where a home applies specific social work models, inspectors may ask staff if they have received training in these and to explain how the application of the models benefits children. Inspectors should not make judgements about the approach itself but should evaluate its impact on the children's experiences and progress. If an inspector has any concerns about the efficacy or authenticity of a particular approach, they should seek advice from their manager.

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
- whether children's intimate care needs are met sensitively and their rights to privacy are respected
- 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

Short break services for disabled children

For this type of provider, inspectors should take into account some specific considerations.

There is likely to be a greater emphasis on experiences for children than on progress, although the service should still focus on working with others to support progress where it can. The impact of the service on children's progress is likely to be influenced by the frequency and length of the short-break stays. Children should be supported to enjoy experiences that may not be available to them otherwise.

The quality of introductions to the service and the level of engagement with the family and with other professionals to provide consistent and safe care and minimise disruption in children's lives are critical.

Parents/carers are likely to hold the central role in relation to many aspects of the care of the child. Therefore, inspectors should place particular emphasis on evaluating the quality of these relationships and how they support the best possible experience for children.

Inspectors should also take into account the following aspects of short break services:

- how stays are planned
- how decisions are made about the groups of children who visit together
- how friendships are supported
- the experiences that children are offered and how these add to their lives

Residential special schools also registered as children's homes

For this type of provider, inspectors should take into account some specific considerations.

Larger group-care settings may look and feel different to a family home. Inspectors should evaluate how the organisation of the home meets the needs of the children who live there. Children living in these homes may live within larger groups, spread across a number of sites or houses. For some children, being able to socialise in large groups is an important element of their experience and learning. However, this may not be the desired experience for all children. Inspectors should evaluate how the organisation can meet the needs of all children living there.

The building and private and communal areas may need to be adapted to meet the needs of individual children. Inspectors need to take time to understand this and ask for explanations when they are unsure. Equally, inspectors should, where necessary, challenge 'custom and practice' to determine that services continually adapt and evolve to meet the needs of children.

Parents/carers may hold the central role in relation to many aspects of the care of the children. Children will be living in the residential special school for different amounts of time. This is likely to influence the role that the residential special school has in the child's life. Inspectors should take this into account.

Although attendance at school is much less likely to be an issue, how the home manages transitions from home to school and consistency of care between home and school are very significant and must be considered.

Educational curriculums may be developed to support children over a 24-hour period. Inspectors need to understand how opportunities for learning are used to help children progress and feel safe. Structure may be more important for some children. Inspectors need to question and challenge the structure that they see so that they can evaluate how practice is in the best interests of children.

Residential special schools offer a 24-hour environment and can be situated away from communities. This means that external scrutiny and links with the local community are important in supporting children's experiences and safeguarding their welfare.

Particularly important aspects of a residential special school include arrangements:

- for children to complain
- to tell someone they are being bullied
- for them to contact their families or a trusted adult away from the school

Inspecting when health professionals provide services on site

Where this is the case, inspectors should take into account some specific considerations.

Nursing and health professionals should be registered with the relevant professional body, such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council. They should be able to demonstrate this to inspectors. Nurses are required to carry out specific safeguarding training to comply with their own code of practice. Inspectors are not expected to know the detail of individual codes of practice for health professionals. However, it is reasonable to ask for evidence of how these requirements are met.

Nurses should receive regular reflective supervision from a suitably qualified professional in line with professional registration. Inspectors should examine how nurses' practice is subject to monitoring, supervision and external professional scrutiny to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. This includes looking at the systems in place for external scrutiny following an injury, particularly if the injury was sustained as a result of a physical restraint, a possible non-accidental injury, or an injury from another child.

The working hours of nursing and medical staff and the procedures for administration of drugs should meet the individual needs and routines of children.

Inspectors should consider the quality of the arrangements for the secondary dispensing of drugs by medical staff, the management of changes of prescribed drugs, the systems in place to audit the drugs held on site and the procedures in place in the event of mal-administration of medication.

Incomplete inspections

We will apply [our policy on incomplete inspections](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gathering-additional-evidence-to-secure-an-incomplete-inspection) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gathering-additional-evidence-to-secure-an-incomplete-inspection>) where appropriate.

Positive environments where children can flourish

Inspectors should use [Positive environments where children can flourish](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-environments-where-children-can-flourish) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/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.

When social care regulatory inspectors are carrying out inspections alongside education inspectors, they must familiarise themselves with:

- the [education inspection framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>)
- the [non-association independent school inspection handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015>)
- [Use of reasonable force in schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-reasonable-force-in-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-reasonable-force-in-schools>)

Inspecting homes where young adults live

The [Care Standards Act 2000](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents>) requires a 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 aged 17 or under.

Children living at a children's home are often vulnerable and/or disabled. Therefore, it is not always right for them to leave the children's home by their 18th birthday. It may be in their best interests to stay at the children's home. The reasons for this may include where:

- the child's moving-on placement has fallen through and the placing authority is seeking alternative arrangements
- the child is in education and wishes to finish their course
- the child wishes to remain with siblings who are also accommodated at the home
- there is agreement, including the child's, that they are not yet ready to leave and a focused plan is in place to achieve this

Ofsted's duty to inspect 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 children's home.

The [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made)

(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>) apply to children and young adults living at the home.

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

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

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.

In some cases, we may extend this 12-month period to an 18-month period (after a child has turned 18) when this covers a young person leaving school. This is to recognise that disabled young adults are entitled to receive secondary education up to the end of the June following their 19th birthday.

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 and young person in the home must have a regularly updated and reviewed moving-on plan and care plan, including a transition plan if the young person will require support from adult social care. This is to ensure that homes use the 'wholly or mainly' policy in the best interests of children and young people 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 homes are complying with the 'wholly or mainly' policy. They should clarify the home's intentions, such as whether it wishes to remain as a children's home or change to an adult care home.

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 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 policy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy>).

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

The 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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy/safeguarding-concerns-guidance-for-inspectors) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy/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 DCS for the responsible placing local authority, where 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.

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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty>).

Inspectors can contact their RIM, who may seek specialist advice. If inspectors are unable to contact their RIM and remain concerned, they should follow [Ofsted's safeguarding policy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy>).

Female genital mutilation: the duty to notify police

Since 31 October 2015, when [section 74 of the Serious Crime Act 2015](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/section/74/enacted) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/section/74/enacted>) inserted new section 5B into the [Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/31) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/31>), 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 where 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 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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy/safeguarding-concerns-guidance-for-inspectors) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-safeguarding-policy/safeguarding-concerns-guidance-for-inspectors>).

Reporting concerns about the administration and management of controlled drugs

If inspectors come across concerns or incidents about the safe management of controlled drugs during their normal inspection duties, or receive information through any other source, they should email an outline of the concern and action taken to the social care policy team: socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk.

This action is in addition to any regulatory action or recommendations made as a result of the concern. Referrals should be made even when no requirements or recommendations are to be made. The social care policy team will collate all these referrals and share them with the Care Quality Commission (CQC)'s Controlled Drugs National Group.

[Detailed information about controlled drugs](https://www.cqc.org.uk/content/law-and-guidance-managing-controlled-drugs) (<https://www.cqc.org.uk/content/law-and-guidance-managing-controlled-drugs>) (examples include morphine, pethidine, methadone and Ritalin) is available from the CQC.

Qualifications of registered managers and staff in 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.

A manager without this qualification must gain the qualification within 3 years of starting to manage the home.

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 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 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 requires 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

Where 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](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/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](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-privacy-notices/social-care-ofsted-privacy-notice>) 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.

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