

Conducting inspections of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies

Guidance on the inspection of adoption agencies

This guidance is designed to assist inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) when conducting inspections of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies. It should be read in conjunction with the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule.

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Introduction

1. This guidance is designed to assist inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) when conducting inspections of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies in England (referred to as adoption agencies). Adoption agencies can use the guidance to see how inspections are conducted.
2. This guidance should be read in conjunction with *Inspection of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies*¹ and the *Inspections of adoption agencies: evaluation schedule and grade descriptors*.²

Scheduling and team deployment

3. We have a duty to inspect adoption agencies at least once in every three-year cycle.³ The scheduling of inspections takes account of: legal requirements; previous inspection findings; complaints and concerns about the service; performance information held by the Department of Education; the timing of other inspections in local authorities; and notifications and monitoring reports provided to Ofsted.
4. Local authority adoption agency inspections will involve two suitably experienced and trained inspectors spending three days on site (usually spread over four days) with an additional day each to prepare and a day for the lead inspector to write the report. The inspection of voluntary adoption agencies will involve one suitably experienced and trained inspector spending four days on site (usually spread over five days) with one additional day to prepare and one additional day to write the report.

Notice

5. Ten working days' notice will be given of the inspection.
6. When we give notice of the inspection, we will also ask the agency to make arrangements for meetings with key people and groups of stakeholders. An example letter can be found at Annex A. During the inspection, inspectors may also identify other people with whom they wish to speak.
7. We ask providers to allow access to premises, space for the inspector, access to records through electronic files and paper files, if they are used, and someone

¹ *Inspection of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies* (120004), Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120004.

² *Inspections of adoption agencies: evaluation schedule and grade descriptors* (120007), Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120007.

³ Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Children's Homes etc) Regulations 2007 (S.I. 2007/694). As amended by (SI 2011/553).

to support the inspectors' access to relevant electronic files. Inspectors will not ask for files to be provided in hard copy unless these are already used by the agency, but they may ask for specific reports, for example child placement reports, to be provided in hard copy.

Timeframe

8. The timeframe for inspections, including preparation, on-site work and the publication of the inspection report, is as follows in working days.

Day	Inspection activity Local authorities – two inspectors	Inspection activity Voluntary adoption agencies (VAA) – one inspector
1	Preparation for each inspector	Preparation
2 – Half-day	Afternoon site visit	Afternoon site visit
3	Site visit	Site visit
4	Site visit	Site visit
5 – Half-day in a local authority	Morning site visit and feedback	Site visit
6 – Half-day in a VAA	Writing the report	Morning site visit and feedback (half-day)
7		Writing the report
7–10	Inspection evidence and report (toolkit) submitted for quality assurance	Inspection evidence and report (toolkit) submitted for quality assurance
15	Report sent to the registered provider for any comments on factual accuracy, within 10 working days of the end of the inspection	Report sent to the registered provider for any comments on factual accuracy, within 10 working days of the end of the inspection
20	Provider returns the draft report within five working days with any comments on factual accuracy	Provider returns the draft report within five working days with any comments on factual accuracy
25	The final report will be published on the Ofsted website within 20 working days of the end of the inspection	The final report will be published on the Ofsted website within 20 working days of the end of the inspection

Pre-inspection activity

9. Two inspectors are allocated one day each to prepare for an inspection of a local authority adoption agency. One inspector will have one day to prepare for

an inspection of a voluntary adoption agency. In local authority inspections, the lead inspector will divide the preparation tasks between the two inspectors on a basis that takes account of their skills, experience and preferences. Lines of enquiry will be identified together beforehand. The inspector will consider, as appropriate, all the data below:

- previous inspection reports, including the children's services assessment letter and reports of safeguarding and looked after children inspections
 - annual data submissions from the agency
 - data analysis by Ofsted
 - updated data and case lists submitted by the adoption agency following notice of the inspection
 - reports made under national minimum standard 25
 - three sets of panel meeting minutes
 - completed questionnaires from adopters, children, young people, birth parents and others
 - the up-to-date statement of purpose and children's guide
 - concerns and complaints made to Ofsted
 - notifications of significant events made to Ofsted
 - any changes to registration, including change of manager
 - any enforcement activity since the previous inspection
 - content of the provider's website.
10. If information has been received that indicates potential non-compliance with regulatory requirements, Ofsted may decide to investigate compliance issues at an inspection, taking into account the date of the last inspection and the requirement for 10 days' notice. In these cases, the concern will be used as part of the lines of enquiry for the inspection. The inspector will outline the concern to the adoption agency at the beginning of the inspection. Annex B contains guidance on the content of the inspection report and covers how inspectors will report on concerns that have been investigated during an inspection.
11. Inspectors will consider at least three sets of panel minutes, which may lead to lines of enquiry in respect of particular children, young people and adopters, and the functioning of the central list of panel members or of the adoption agency. They will also consider details of current cases – adopters and children – submitted by the local authority to enable appropriate case selection.
12. Agencies may submit additional information and up-to-date data when they return the documentation requested in the letter announcing the inspection. This material must be explicitly relevant to the inspection framework and the associated evaluation schedule and enhance or clarify information about the

quality of the service provided. Statistical data submitted prior to the inspection must be correct at the time of submission. Amendments or changes to data submitted during the inspection may not be accepted as any statistical elements of the reports will be based on data submitted in the annual returns and immediately before the inspection.

13. The inspectors carry out an analysis of the available evidence and information and, following discussion with the second inspector in local authority inspections, the lead inspector records their planning notes within the planning section of the Regulatory Support Application⁴ (RSA) toolkit. The plan for the inspection will identify lines of enquiry, any areas of apparent weakness or significant strength and areas where further evidence needs to be gathered. If the inspection is subject to an evidence-based review for quality assurance purposes, the inspection plan will be considered as part of this. The focus of the inspection may change during its course as further evidence emerges.

Reports under national minimum standard 25

14. National minimum standard 25.6 states that the executive side of the local authority or the voluntary adoption agency's trustees, board members or management committee members should:
 - 'receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every six months'
 - 'monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users'
 - 'satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration'.
15. Ofsted provides a template for these reports, which contains data we require for inspection and replaces the pre-inspection self-evaluation and data forms. Agencies do not have to use the quality assurance section of the form and may use their own management reporting formats. If this is the case, these reports will be requested when notice is given. We ask that these data and quality assurance reports are submitted to Ofsted once a year based on data for the year 1 April to 31 March.
16. As part of the pre-inspection activity on the inspection planning day, inspectors will consider the 'national minimum standard 25 reports'. Any emerging lines of enquiry will be included in the inspection plan.

⁴ The RSA is the electronic system that Ofsted uses to administer and record regulatory inspections.

Gathering views of children, young people, adoptive parents and birth parents, staff and partner organisations prior to inspection

17. The views and experiences of children and young people, adult adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents, staff and other stakeholders – such as placing social workers and independent reviewing officers – inform lines of enquiry for each inspection. They are an important part of inspection evidence. It should be noted that this is an inspection of the adoption agency and not adopters.
18. Ofsted will send out a link to online questionnaires for all these groups at a point of time during the inspection year. They will be available for one month each year (although in the first year they will be available for two months), at the same time as the quality assurance and data forms. They are in an electronic format and allow those with internet access to respond to us directly. We will promote the online questionnaires, and will ask agencies to ensure that they publicise them to all adopters, prospective adopters, staff and partners and, where relevant, children and young people. Hard copies are also available on request. We will supply business reply envelopes to children and young people only.
19. We will also supply all adoption agencies with symbol versions of questionnaires by email to distribute to children who use the following alternative means of communication: Widgit, Makaton and Picture Communication Symbols. There are also film clips of the children and young person's version using British sign language (BSL). The responses to the symbol and BSL versions should be returned as hard copy or by scanning into email. Providers can contact us for a supply of business reply envelopes.
20. An analysis of the online questionnaires and copies of all symbol versions received will be made available to inspectors prior to inspection.

Deferrals

21. Inspections will not normally be deferred. If on arrival/notice it is found that key staff are unavailable or absent this will not normally constitute reasons for deferral.
22. Deferrals will only be made in exceptional circumstances, for example if the inspection went ahead it might place people at risk, or if the ability to gather secure evidence is severely restricted.
23. Decisions about deferrals are agreed by the Managing Inspector with responsibility for adoption.

Inspection activity

24. At the start of the inspection the inspector/s will confirm their identity by producing their Ofsted Inspector Authorisation and identification card and identity badge. It is not necessary to carry paper copies of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. The inspector/s will discuss the inspection plan with the manager, confirming if any further information or meetings have to be arranged.
25. The days on site will be used for discussions with managers, adopters and staff, and if possible groups of children and young people, and to examine files. Inspectors will seek evidence against the evaluation schedule and will take into account issues already identified through pre-inspection data and questionnaires. The organisation of the days on site will depend on when meetings and discussions can be held and what evidence is required to make secure judgements. However, a significant amount of time will be used to examine case files and discuss any issues arising from those files. This may, for example, include discussions/telephone calls with placing social workers, adopters, foster carers and independent reviewing officers.
26. Due to potential sensitivities and vulnerabilities surrounding adoption it is important that the inspector involves the agency in the final selection of children, young people, birth relatives and adoptive families to whom they may speak. Inspectors may identify other people, in addition to those already identified, that they wish to speak with during the inspection.
27. The inspection will focus on gathering evidence against the evaluation schedule. The detail of activities undertaken and discussions held will vary depending on the lines of enquiry for each individual inspection. However, every inspection will examine how the agency ensures that delays are minimised for children, young people and adopters. In local authorities inspectors will evaluate the time taken to identify children who should be adopted, their characteristics, the number of children who are waiting for a placement and how long they have been waiting.

Case sampling

28. Inspectors will access at least six case files, of which at least three in local authorities will be children's files, and they will cover the range of the adoption agency's work. Inspectors may access a much larger number of files in larger agencies or to evaluate particular issues, for example practice in relation to matching, that may have arisen during pre-inspection planning or during the inspection. The inspector will select files using the case details provided when notice of the inspection was given.
29. Where the case file covers a long period of time, judgements about agency performance will be based on recent practice and will take into account evidence of longer term improvements or decline. Inspectors may read

historical information to understand the service and its impact on outcomes for children who are or should be adopted. Case file sampling may lead to discussions with social workers, adopters and, where appropriate, children and young people.

30. Inspectors access files via electronic systems, if used, with support from the service. Inspectors may ask for specific documents to be available in hard copy, for example a child placement report. Providers must ensure that inspectors have access and support to use their system from the first day of inspection.
31. Inspectors will examine, discuss and evaluate cases in line with the criteria set out in the evaluation schedule.
32. Inspectors will sample a range of documents from files to support their lines of enquiry. This may include, for example, information and documents relating to the following:
 - placement decisions
 - information provided to adopters prior to placement
 - children's and birth families' views
 - child permanence reports
 - life story work and later life letters
 - adoption support files
 - the suitability of the placement, taking into account the views of the adopters and the needs of the children
 - matching and the adoption placement report
 - panel minutes
 - the approval processes for adopters and records kept
 - prospective adopters' reports, including those who withdrew from the process
 - the preparation, training and support of adopters
 - the impact of children's views on planning and placement
 - support assessments and plans
 - referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)
 - complaints file/record
 - ongoing case recording.

Examination of records, policies and procedures

33. The adoption agency's statement of purpose and children's guide should be available on the internet and form part of the pre-inspection data. We should

also hold copies in our database as agencies are required to submit these documents to us whenever they are changed.

34. Other documents will be examined where they are relevant to a line of enquiry for that individual inspection. Inspectors will not routinely examine all policies and procedures.
35. Inspectors will access personnel records in respect of anyone working for purposes of the agency (this includes panel members), which can be maintained within checklist or spreadsheet format. The information available for inspection should reflect schedule 2 of The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005, and must include the reference number of the subject's CRB check. Inspectors may sample more detailed personnel records if information contained within any spreadsheet is insufficient or particular evidence is needed to pursue a line of enquiry. If recruitment records are not maintained at the premises where the inspector is based for the inspection, the provider will need to arrange for any files required to be made available on site.

Interviews and discussions with adopters, children and young people and other interested parties

Focus groups

36. All adoption agencies will be asked to arrange focus groups following individual lines of enquiry. Local authorities will also be asked to arrange a focus group with children and young people's social workers and/or their managers.
37. During their preparation and during the inspection, inspectors will identify individuals with whom they wish to speak and, depending on the make-up of any focus groups, these may include:
 - adult adoptees
 - birth relatives
 - adoptive families, at any stage of the process including those not yet approved
 - the chair of the adoption panel or the panel adviser and if not available independent members of the central list including the medical advisor
 - independent reviewing officers
 - adoption staff and managers
 - social workers and managers for looked after children who are or may be placed for adoption
 - other professionals involved with the adoption agency

- children and young people who are, or are about to be, placed with an adoptive family or who have been adopted, and those who are receiving adoption support and wish to speak to an inspector
- children and young people who have experienced a placement disruption or breakdown if they are identified by the agency as wishing to speak to an inspector
- foster carers, particularly those who specialise in pre-adoption work
- children's guardians
- representatives of the Independent Reviewing Mechanism
- Local Authority Designated Officer.

Understanding the experience of children and young people

38. The experiences of children and young people who are waiting to be or are adopted, or who are receiving adoption support, are at the centre of the inspection and may provide key evidence in assessing outcomes against the evaluation schedule. Inspectors will always try to speak with children and young people during the inspection with consent from the person with parental responsibility, although this may often not be possible due to the age of children or particular placement circumstances.
39. In adoption agencies, it is likely that ways other than direct discussion with children and young people will be used to understand their experiences. These may include discussions with people who know the child or young person, particularly adoptive parents, but also the views of social workers, independent reviewing officers, foster carers and the agency itself. Inspectors will always assess how well the adoption agency consults children and young people and what impact this has on service delivery.
40. Inspectors will demonstrate safe and sensitive practice throughout the inspection. Examples include:
 - explaining to children and young people that they will not include comments that will identify them in the inspection report or in feedback to adopters or the adoption agency unless the child or young person asks for this to be done
 - explaining to children and young people that information suggesting that they or another child or young person is at risk of harm will be passed by the inspector to an appropriate person able to take necessary action about that concern.
41. Inspectors should always take account of privacy and confidentiality when talking to children and young people, be it in person or on the telephone. Where a call back is requested, the inspector should always use a contact number in the agency or Ofsted's national number: 0300 123 1231.

Listening and talking to adult adoptees, adopters and birth relatives

42. Adult adoptees, adopters and birth relatives will be able to provide key evidence in assessing outcomes for children and young people against the evaluation schedule. Their views and experiences will also offer valuable evidence about the operation of the adoption agency, including the approval, matching and placing processes and the availability of support.
43. One of the most efficient ways to gather the views of adopters is to hold a focus group. There may also be other meetings for adopters, or adoption applicants, which are taking place during the inspection that the inspector can attend. The purpose of attendance would be to discuss the operation of the agency, not to observe the group or delivery of training.
44. Inspectors should always take account of privacy and confidentiality when talking to adopters and birth relatives, be it in person or on the telephone. Where a call back is requested, the inspector should always use the agency's office if appropriate or Ofsted's national number: 0300 123 1231.
45. Inspectors will assess how effectively the adoption agency engages with adult adoptees, adopters and birth relatives and what impact this has on service delivery and outcomes for children.
46. Inspectors will explain the inspection process and confidentiality. They will ask adopters and birth relatives if they received the invitation to participate in the online questionnaire and if they completed it. Discussions with adopters will depend on any lines of inquiry identified.

Gathering views from stakeholders

47. Inspectors will consult with stakeholders to inform the inspection findings. This will usually be through a telephone call. Stakeholders may include any of the people listed in paragraph 37 or others who appear to be able to offer relevant information to the inspection. These people will vary depending on the nature of the adoption agency and will include children's and young people's social workers and members of the adoption panel, and may include commissioners and health services among others.
48. Inspectors should always take account of privacy and confidentiality when talking to stakeholders on the telephone. Where a call back is requested, the inspector should always use a contact number in the agency or Ofsted's national number: 0300 123 1231.

Key meetings

49. Inspectors will use focus groups and may, if appropriate, use any scheduled meetings as opportunities for following lines of enquiry. The amount of time available is restricted and therefore any attendance must be focused on a

particular line of enquiry and time limited. There is no requirement to attend scheduled meetings, but these might include:

- staff meetings
- adopters' meetings
- placement finding and matching activities.

Discussions with the managers

50. Individual interviews will be held with the manager and may also be held with the responsible individual and/or registered person.
51. The interview with the manager will include these elements:
 - issues that the inspector wishes to explore with the manager that have arisen from pre-inspection information
 - how the manager involves adopters and children and young people
 - how they monitor the impact of their service on outcomes for children
 - follow up on progress in response to previous requirements and recommendations
 - the plans for future development of the adoption agency
 - the arrangements for supervision received by the manager
 - any further evidence that the manager may wish to highlight with the inspector.

Safeguarding concerns

52. If serious issues of concern arise, for example in relation to the failure to follow child protection procedures and/or where a child is discovered to be at immediate risk of harm, the adoption agency's senior manager will be notified as soon as possible unless this compromises the child/young person's safety. Inspectors should always follow Ofsted's *Safeguarding policy and procedures*,⁵ and should contact the national compliance, investigation and enforcement team on 0300 123 1231 if they need advice. Where required, a referral will be made by the inspector to the compliance, investigation and enforcement team, the appropriate local authority children's services and the child/young person's allocated social worker.

Recording evidence

53. Throughout the inspection, inspectors will maintain a record of their evidence. Electronic evidence is recorded within the RSA toolkit evidence screen. In most

⁵ *Safeguarding policy and procedures* (100183), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100183 .

circumstances once the summarised evidence has been placed in the RSA the inspector will destroy any duplicate handwritten evidence. In some circumstances, inspectors will be required to keep any handwritten notes they have made during the inspection. This would apply in circumstances where legal action is being considered or a challenge or complaint about the judgement is anticipated. Inspectors need to record all handwritten evidence using black ink so that it can be photocopied if necessary. All handwritten evidence must be legible and dated. It must be recorded in a notebook which is only used to record evidence for that inspection. Inspectors must submit all handwritten evidence that will form part of the inspection evidence base to the national quality assurance team within five working days of the end of the on-site visit. All inspection records will be retained in accordance with Ofsted's published retention policy.⁶

54. Evidence should be clear, evaluative and sufficient for the purpose of supporting the judgements. It should not include anything that could identify individual staff, children, young people or family members, unless this is necessary for the protection of a child/young person. Inspectors can record direct quotes from children and young people, adult adoptees, birth relatives, adopters and stakeholders in evidence to support judgements, although evidence should never use individuals' names or initials unless they are the names of the registered person or nominated managers.
55. Evidence may be scrutinised for quality assurance and will be considered in the event of any complaint.

Inspection findings

56. Failures to meet regulations and national minimum standards that are identified and addressed during the inspection must be reported. In exceptional circumstances where matters are minor and immediately and satisfactorily resolved they may not result in a requirement or recommendation.
57. The *Evaluation schedule for the inspection of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies* sets out illustrative evidence of an outstanding, good, adequate and inadequate service. Inspectors will use this to formulate their findings and judgements and to prepare verbal feedback to the manager.

Inspection feedback

58. During the inspection, inspectors will share emerging findings about the adoption agency's key strengths and weaknesses. Shortfalls that could have an immediate impact on the safety of children, young people and/or staff will be

⁶ *Handling and retention of inspection evidence* (100122), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100122.

brought to the immediate attention of the manager or another senior person in the agency.

59. At the end of the inspection the inspector will give verbal feedback on the main findings and provisional judgements to the manager; the report and judgements will be subject to quality assurance processes and may be subject to change. In exceptional circumstances, an inspector may need additional time after the inspection fieldwork to take advice before giving feedback. The date of feedback is counted as the last day of the inspection.
60. The feedback should:
 - cover the main findings of the inspection against the evaluation schedule, including both strengths and weaknesses
 - indicate likely requirements and recommendations with clear reference to the relevant regulation, national minimum standard or adoption guidance, providing a clear agenda for improvement
 - use the grade descriptors to indicate how the inspector has arrived at her/his judgements and confirm that the report will be sent to the manager in draft for comments on factual accuracy (see 'Timeframe' at paragraph 8 above)
 - confirm if letters outlining the judgements and thanking children and young people for participating will be sent for the provider to circulate alongside the final report.
61. Inspectors will not provide a written summary of the inspection or written feedback in advance of the inspection report. Providers may choose to take their own notes at feedback.

Writing the report

62. Inspectors are responsible for producing high-quality reports. In local authority inspections the lead inspector writes the report. The inspector should ensure that the report is free from errors in, for example, grammar, spelling and punctuation before submitting the report. Reports should be written in the present tense. However, a specific example of evidence from the inspection should be written in the past tense.
63. Inspectors should write their reports with regard to the *Guide to Ofsted's house style*.⁷ In addition, a quality checklist is included within Annex C of this guidance to help authors and readers of Ofsted's reports.
64. The report should be succinct and evaluative. Inspectors should make clear and unequivocal judgements about the level of delays and proportion of children

⁷ *Guide to Ofsted's house style* (080230), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080230.

being adopted rather than describing processes. Inspectors should make appropriate professional judgements about the extent of detail required to 'tell the story' of the experience of children and young people who are waiting to be or have been adopted.

65. The overall effectiveness section should include an evaluation of the trends in agency performance and compare them to those found nationally. Data on the proportion of looked after children in a local authority who are adopted and the compliance with timescales will be considered and will inform, but not determine, this judgement.
66. The quality of inspection reports is enhanced when feedback from children, young people, adult adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents is quoted within the report and used to illustrate evaluation about the quality of the adoption agency. However, in smaller agencies the potential to identify children and young people is high and should be taken into account.
67. There is no specified word length for the report or the individual sections. Inspectors should use their professional judgement to ensure that the reports are long enough to say what needs to be said and no more. It is likely that reports for adoption agencies with a number of weaknesses or services found to be outstanding will require more detailed explanations of the reasons for the judgements.
68. Ofsted will send a copy of the report to the provider and publish it on our website.

Letters to children and young people

69. Inspectors will complete a letter for children and young people following the inspection of an adoption agency where children and young people were directly involved, which tells them the overall judgement and briefly outlines the main findings. This letter will also be available in symbol versions. Providers should forward this letter to all children and young people who took part in the inspection.

Quality assurance

70. The inspector is responsible for the quality of the report, and will check the completed report carefully before submitting it to the national quality assurance team for sign off for publication.
71. Inspectors must use the *Guide to Ofsted's house style* for reference when quality checking their own reports.
72. Ofsted's national quality assurance team assures the quality of:
 - inspection reports

- the evidence base underpinning inspection judgements
 - inspection fieldwork through a programme of accompanied visits.
73. The national quality assurance team will discuss with the Divisional Manager, Inspection Delivery any proposed change of judgement from the provisional judgement given at verbal feedback during the inspection. On these occasions, the inspector must inform the agency of the revised judgements and provide reasons for the changes before the provider receives the draft report.
74. Ofsted will send an evaluation form following each inspection to the manager of the adoption agency to complete, which will be used to improve the quality of inspections.

Concerns

75. It is anticipated that the great majority of inspections will be carried out without any concerns on the part of the adoption agency.
76. Inspections are carried out in accordance with the principles of inspection and code of conduct set out in the inspection framework for local authority and voluntary adoption agencies.
77. During an inspection, those with concerns are strongly encouraged to raise issues with the inspector as soon as they arise, so that they can be resolved as quickly as possible while the inspection is taking place. If concerns do arise during an inspection, the inspector should consider the concern and do everything possible to remedy the problem.
78. If resolution of the concerns is not possible, or the person expressing the concerns does not feel that adequate weight is being given to them, or an independent view is sought, then the person raising the concerns, or someone acting on her or his behalf, should contact the Ofsted helpline on 0300 123 4666.

Complaints

79. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns then individuals or providers may decide to lodge a formal complaint. Normally, a complaint can be made at any stage during an inspection or up to 30 calendar days from the date of publication of any report. Complaints should normally be made in writing – by post or email. However, we will also accept complaints by telephone. Where we accept complaints in this way, we will not normally take any formal action until we have agreed a written account of the complaint with the complainant.
80. The complaints procedure, which sets out how providers or users can complain about their inspection and what will happen to their complaint, is available at: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070080.

81. Lodging a complaint will not normally delay the publication of the final inspection report.

82. Complaints can be made in writing to:

The National Complaints Team
Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Or emailed to us at: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Or made by telephone: 0300 123 4666.

Annex A. Notice of inspection

Dear

Notice of inspection

This letter is to confirm that Ofsted will be carrying out an inspection of your adoption agency commencing on >inspection due date< and ending on >last inspection day<. The name of the lead inspector is >name< and the second inspector is >name<. The lead inspector will contact you to discuss the inspection.

To ensure that inspector time is used effectively we ask that you provide us with some information in advance of your inspection. This is explained below.

Focus groups and discussions

Please find enclosed a list of focus groups and discussions that we would like you to arrange. If there are existing appropriate groups running, please do use these. Please also ensure there are at least 30 minutes between meetings and that there are no meetings arranged for the first day or the last day of the inspection. Focus groups should be on-site wherever possible and may last between 45 and 90 minutes, depending on attendance. Discussions with individuals may be held by telephone. >As there will be two inspectors some meetings can be held at the same time<. No additional meetings should be arranged unless agreed with the inspector.

Case list

The records that the inspector will generally need to see are case files, children's adoption files, adopters' files (including assessment reports and reviews), supervision notes, team meeting notes, staff recruitment files and panel meeting minutes. Please provide the details listed in the attached case lists. The inspector will use these to select the files they will look at during the inspection.

If you have children's/staff records stored electronically please ensure that there will be a member of staff available to support the inspector in accessing these. If these records are stored off-site please be prepared to deliver them to the location of the inspector.

The inspector will be sampling and reading files throughout the inspection and will need time to incorporate this into their inspection programme.

Panel meeting minutes

Please also provide the minutes from the last three panel meetings.

Data

The inspector will have the data you submitted on the annual quality assurance form and from completed questionnaires. If you want to provide any updated, brief,

relevant statistical data or information it should be returned with the attached forms. Additional information or data should only be supplied during the inspection at the request or with the agreement of the inspector.

Returning documents to Ofsted

All information should be returned within five working days of the date of this letter by email to the lead inspector at >inspector email address< and copy in >IST name email address<. Please note that any sensitive information that you send by email should be anonymous or encrypted. You can find out more information about encryption at www.getsafeonline.org.

Additional information

The inspector may ask you to arrange telephone calls with children and young people, placing social workers, commissioners or independent reviewing officers.

The inspector will feed back their findings at the end of the inspection to key people in the agency or service that you identify. Please keep this number to a minimum.

Further information about the inspection is available in *Conducting inspections of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies* at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120035.

If you have any further questions, please contact me on 0300 123 1231.

Yours sincerely

>Name<

Inspection Support Team

Information for inspection

Have you returned:

- the details about arranged meetings? **Yes / No**
- a completed case list? **Yes / No**
- the last three panel meeting minutes? **Yes / No**
- any updated statistical data? **Yes / No**

Signed:

Print name:

Job title:

Agency or service:

URN:

Date:

Meetings/focus groups/telephone calls

Please arrange the meetings, focus groups or telephone calls listed in the table below and provide a contact name, date and time.

Meetings	Contact name	Date and time
A focus group of social workers for adopted children (local authorities only)		
A focus group of staff who work with adopters		
A small focus group (up to eight) of children and young people who have been adopted (if possible/appropriate)		
A focus group of adopters		
A meeting with the manager of the agency on each day of the inspection		
A meeting with the registered person (voluntary adoption agencies only)		
Discussions		
With placing social workers in voluntary adoption agencies		
With a relevant commissioner in the local authority		

With the panel chair or vice-chair (or panel members if the chair is not available)		
With the agency decision-maker		
With the registered person (voluntary adoption agencies only)		
With the local authority children's nurse		
With the virtual headteacher for looked after children		

The case list is available on the Ofsted website:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/adoption-inspection-case-list.

Annex B. The content of the inspection report

Brief description of the service

This is a brief factual description of the agency and should not include judgements or evaluation.

It should describe:

- the size of the adoption agency, numbers of children who have been placed for adoption in the last year, numbers of children approved and waiting for an adoptive placement and numbers of adopters approved in the last year
- whether it is a voluntary adoption agency, part of a national organisation or managed by the local authority
- the range of adoption services provided and any specialism
- any other relevant registration information such as whether the adoption agency is one of several registered with Ofsted.

Overall effectiveness

This section should be a brief summary of the outcome of the inspection, explaining the main reasons for the overall effectiveness judgement. It should highlight any outstanding practice and the adoption agency's strengths. It must include reference to any areas for improvement but should not list the requirements and recommendations. Inspectors must evaluate trends in service performance and compare those trends with those found nationally. This section should provide the reader with a clear picture of the quality of the adoption agency.

Statutory requirements and recommendations

Requirements and recommendations must arise from any weaknesses identified in the report.

Requirements

Requirements must link clearly to regulations. Inspectors must consider the wording of the requirements to ensure that providers are not asked to do something they do not have to do. Inspectors should, wherever possible, use the wording of the regulation. However, the requirement should be sufficiently detailed so that it is clear what is being asked of the provider: on occasion this may require more explanation. The wording should be followed by the regulation in the form of (Regulation 31(2)(c)). Requirements cannot be made in inspection of local authority services.

Recommendations

Where a recommendation made to a local authority relates to a regulation, the recommendations should be written in the same format as a requirement (as above).

Recommendations, although not enforceable, promote good practice, always relate to a national minimum standard and help the home to improve outcomes for children and young people. Recommendations can also be made against statutory guidance. Any recommendation should be sufficiently detailed so that it is clear what is being asked of the provider.

Requirements and recommendations should start with a verb. Commonly used verbs are: ensure, update, implement, improve, create, devise, keep, maintain and revise. They should follow on from the stem 'the provider must/should'.

Requirements and recommendations should start with a lower case letter as they follow on from a stem in the inspection report. There should be no full stops at the end of the requirement/recommendation except for the final one. This should have a full stop at the end of the wording, but before the regulation or national minimum standard it is related to. The relevant regulation or national minimum standard will be included within brackets – in the case of statutory guidance, in the form (Volume 5, statutory guidance, para XX).

In all cases where a voluntary adoption agency is judged inadequate, the inspector will set requirements so that the registered person/s meet the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. They **may also** make recommendations to help the registered person/s to improve the quality and standards of care further.

All sections of the report

Inspectors need to inspect against the full evaluation schedule but it is not necessary to report against each aspect of the evaluation schedule. Text should provide a brief commentary on the key strengths and weaknesses that support the judgement given and, most importantly, tell the unique story of each adoption agency and the experience of and outcomes for children and young people.

Inspectors do not need to write a section of the report about each area they have evaluated but must include enough in the report to support their judgement and make it clear to the reader. While the evidence will confirm that the whole evaluation schedule has been inspected, the report will focus on the key strengths and weaknesses that support the judgements made.

There will be references to equality and diversity throughout the report. In addition, there are specific parts of the evaluation schedule that relate to equality and diversity. Inspectors will make comments relating to equality and diversity linked to the evaluation schedule.

Outcomes for children and young people

This section should focus on the experiences of children and how they progress in their adoption placement. What helps them to progress should generally appear in other sections of the report.

The quality of service provision

This section should focus on service provision and how, through the recruitment, assessment, supervision and training of adopters, positive outcomes for children and young people are promoted.

Safeguarding

This section focuses on how the service puts safeguarding at the centre of all it does.

Leadership and management

This section should identify the key aspects of practice that support the judgement for leadership and management including strengths and weaknesses.

Inspectors should evaluate and report on how the steps taken to tackle requirements and recommendations or key issues raised at the last inspection have improved outcomes for children and young people and the organisation of the provision.

Inspectors should not write out previous requirements, recommendations or key issues in full but should report on the agency's progress in achieving the requirements or recommendations. For example, inspectors can say that the quality and impact of training has improved, or children's access to health services is promoted.

General report writing guidance

A well-written report:

- contains more evaluation than description
- has judgements that are clearly supported by good evidence
- is clear on the outcomes and experiences for children and young people
- is unique and captures the character of an adoption agency
- states findings in the present tense but may use the past tense to refer to specific pieces of evidence
- has short sentences
- is simple and easy to understand
- does not identify or contain sensitive information about individual children and young people, staff or others
- includes quotes from children, parents, staff and other professionals where appropriate and possible
- follows the *Guide to Ofsted's house style*.

Reports should be written using the 'active voice'. This is likely to make sentences shorter and more easily understood. For example:

- Passive voice: 'Understanding the children's past and the impact this has on their behaviours is an area in which staff support adopters.'
- Active voice: 'Staff support adopters to understand the children's past and the impact this has on their behaviour.'
- Passive voice: 'A high level of satisfaction is shown by the prospective adopters about their training.'
- Active voice: 'Prospective adopters are highly satisfied with their training.'

Reporting on inspections where compliance issues have been investigated

If concerns are raised and it is agreed that issues of compliance should be investigated at the inspection, the inspector will discuss the concern with the provider. However, they will not refer to the concern in the inspection report, or report whether the concern was substantiated. The inspector will, however, report any non-compliance under the relevant judgement area.

The inspector will raise requirements where there is a breach of regulation. If a higher level of enforcement is required inspectors will consult with Ofsted's compliance, investigation and enforcement team.