

Inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS)

Lisa Pascoe

Deputy director, social care policy



A system not a programme of inspections

- annual self-evaluation of social work practice
- an annual conversation with each local authority (LA)
- focused visits on a potential area of improvement or strength
- standard or short inspection of each LA, depending on what we know (once in a three year period)
- inadequate LAs continue to receive quarterly monitoring and a re-inspection through the SIF

An inspection system

- ILACS is a system, each feature informs how the other works
- This means more frequent engagement between Ofsted inspectors and LAs (not always as part of an inspection)
- We want to help 'catch LAs before they fall' – we want to help LAs avoid becoming inadequate
- We don't want to wait until inspection to find this has happened
- More frequent contact also helps us to make inspection more efficient and less burdensome

Local authority contact with Ofsted

Inadequate local authority	Requires improvement to be good local authority	Good or outstanding local authority
Quarterly monitoring visits	Standard inspection (once in a three year period)	Short inspection (once in a three year period)
SIF or post-monitoring SIF		
Annual conversation	Up to two focused visits in between inspections	Up to two focused visits in between inspections
Shared self-evaluation	Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit)	Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit)
	Annual conversation	Annual conversation
	Shared self-evaluation	Shared self-evaluation

Activity outside of inspection

Self-evaluation and annual engagement



Benefits

- Supports a more proportionate approach to inspection:
 - help Ofsted to make sure that focused visits look at the things that are most useful, for us and the LA
 - help inspectors create relevant lines of enquiry for inspections
 - help Ofsted decide on the best time for a visit/inspections
- Provides Ofsted with evidence that leaders have a grip on social work practice
- If an LA identifies weaknesses and we can see credible, clear, appropriate plans for action, this will be seen as a strength in leadership, not a weakness.

Self-evaluation

- We have worked with the ADCS, SOLACE and LGA to devise guidance
- No set format, but should be brief and answer three questions:
 - What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice with children and families in your authority?
 - How do you know it?
 - What are your plans to maintain or improve practice?
- Should draw on existing documents and activity
- Should reflect business as usual, not created for inspection

Annual engagement meeting

- Discuss self-evaluation, data and intelligence.
- Honest and open conversation
- Consider any future focused visit and how this might support the LA's improvement plans
- No published 'outcome' – Ofsted will write to the DCS summarising the discussion
- Ideally linked to self-evaluation – this does not have to be the same time each year.
- May be part of another meeting, but should allow sufficient time to discuss children's social care

Focused visits



Focused visit scope

- Will be of a particular area of service or cohort of children
- We will usually have discussed the scope and information request with the LA at their annual engagement
- The criteria and information requested will be a 'sub-set' of what appears in the framework
- We may adjust the criteria or information request to reflect local context and the specific scope
- We will use focused visits to evaluate and highlight good practice and areas of concern

Judgements and report

- No graded judgments
- Narrative letter:

- Strengths
 - Areas for improvement
- If we identify serious concerns, we will give unequivocal areas for priority action
- Will inform our decision about when to inspect and whether to use a standard or short inspection

Standard and short inspections



Inspector deployment

- Small teams of inspectors working closely together inspect more efficiently:
 - they spend less time reporting their findings to one another
 - all inspectors know and understand findings from across the inspection
 - they can challenge one another more effectively, closing lines of enquiry and arriving at robust judgements quickly

Onsite activity

- Inspectors will spend most of their time looking at case files with social workers
- They will talk to managers if their findings indicate a strength or concern that they need to triangulate further
- They will hold regular keep-in-touch (KIT) meetings with the DCS. However.....
-they may ask the DCS to meet inspectors at the office where they are inspecting that day

Managing expectations

- To make a proportionate programme work, inspectors must target their activity carefully
- They will not be able to speak with everyone. They will focus on key lines of enquiry and where the emerging findings take them
- Onsite activity will not routinely include set-piece meetings with the same list of people that happens on a SIF
- Inspectors will prioritise activities that tell them about the quality of social work practice with children and families

Difference between a standard and a short

- A short inspection is not a standard squeezed into less time
- Short inspections happen where an LA is good or outstanding and we have no reason to believe they have declined
- There is an assumption the LA remains at least good
- Inspectors will look at whether:
 - The quality of practice has improved, been maintained or deteriorated
 - The authority's self-evaluation is accurate and can be relied on

Inspection judgements

Overall judgement		
Key judgement: The impact of leadership on social work practice with children and families	Key judgement: The experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection	Key judgement: The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers
Narrative: How good leaders are at creating an environment where social work can flourish	Narrative Early help Children in need Children on a child protection plan	Narrative How well permanence is achieved (including adoption) Care leavers Making good decisions

- Overall and key judgements made on our four-point scale: outstanding, good requires improvement to be good, inadequate

Next steps



Next:

- Starting to contact LAs about self-evaluation and annual engagement opportunities
- By end of November – publish the framework and guidance
- January – ‘launch’ events for LAs. Details tbc, but probably:
 - Mon 15 January (pm) and Friday 19 January (am) in Leeds
 - Mon 22 January (pm) and Friday 26 January (am) in London
- January – first inspections announced