

Inspections of arrangements for the protection of children

Evaluation schedule and grade descriptors

This evaluation schedule sets out the arrangements for inspections of local authority arrangements for the protection of children, including the effectiveness of early identification and help for children, young people, and their families and carers.

These inspections will focus on the effectiveness of the local authority's arrangements for protecting children, and the local authority's leadership of strategic partners in their shared work to help and protect children and young people who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect.

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Introduction

1. This evaluation schedule outlines the main aspects of an inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children. It sets out the areas that inspectors will evaluate and the grade descriptors they will use to arrive at their judgements.
2. The evaluation schedule for the inspection of arrangements for the protection of children inspection can be summarised as:
 - Overall effectiveness, including areas for development.
 - The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, and their families and carers.
 - The quality of practice.
 - Leadership and governance.
3. This document should be read alongside the *Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children*.¹

Scope of inspection

4. The inspection will consider key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered.
5. The inspection will focus on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements: for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It will also consider the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.

This includes:

- those children and young people identified by other services – such as adult social care, schools, police, health services and children's centres – as at risk of harm, but who have not yet reached the significant harm threshold (the threshold of 'suffering or likely to suffer significant harm'), and for whom a preventative service would reduce the likelihood of that risk or harm escalating
- those children and young people referred to the local authority, including: those where urgent action has to be taken to protect them; those subject to further assessment; and those subject to child protection enquiries²

¹ *Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children* (110132), Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110132.

² The Children Act 1989, section 47; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

- those who become the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan that sets out the help that will be provided to them and their families to keep them safe and to promote their welfare
- those children and young people who are receiving social work services from the local authority where there are significant levels of concern about their safety and welfare, but these have not reached the significant harm threshold
- those children and young people who are assessed to no longer needing a child protection plan, but who may have continuing needs for help and support.

Overall effectiveness

6. Inspectors will consider evidence and judgements from across the evaluation schedule before arriving at the overall effectiveness judgement. They will take into account the extent to which the local authority and its partners:
- are protecting children effectively
 - are providing effective help to children and young people and their families, at the point where concerns are first identified, and at and after the point of referral to children’s social care, leading to improved outcomes
 - are providing help based on an understanding of both the population of children, young people and families that require help and the experience and individual needs of children, young people and families
 - ensure that practice is child-centred and focused on identifying and protecting children and young people at risk of harm, through robust risk management and decision making at all points in the child’s journey
 - demonstrate strategic leadership and governance that improves the help and protection offered to children and young people
 - are continuously learning, including learning from feedback from children, young people, families and carers, and from practitioners.

Grade descriptors: Overall effectiveness

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| <p>Grade 1: Outstanding</p> | <p>Overall effectiveness is likely to be outstanding when the following apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work with children, young people and families is consistently of a high quality, delivering measurably improved outcomes for most children and young people, including for those from hard to reach groups. ■ Leadership and governance drives improvement across the child protection system and is visible and effective in sustaining high-quality child protection services, including early help services, for all children and young people. Services are responsive to changing need and change is consistently implemented effectively |
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| | <p>and delivers clear benefits to children, young people and families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Effective and continuous learning, challenge and aspiration ensure help and protection for children and young people that deliver improved outcomes for the most vulnerable and hard to reach children. There is effective and continuous learning that impacts positively on practice. |
| <p>Grade 2: Good</p> | <p>Overall effectiveness is likely to be good when the following apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Practice is focused on the needs and views of children, young people and their families and their views inform the help that they experience. The quality of practice experienced by children, young people and families is adequate in nearly all cases and good in most. This is leading to improved outcomes for most children, including some hard to reach groups. Help and protection are delivered through a coordinated multi-agency response. ■ A well coordinated multi-agency early help offer is available to meet the diverse needs of the local population. Leaders have a track record of understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their services, tackling the issues and delivering improvement. ■ The views and experiences of children, young people and their families are at the centre of service development and strategic thinking. A learning culture is well embedded and ensures that opportunities for learning and improvement at individual and strategic levels are taken. |
| <p>Grade 3: Adequate</p> | <p>Overall effectiveness is likely to be adequate when the following apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There are no systemic failures that lead to children failing to be protected. Practice is child-centred and based on sound risk management that ensures that children and young people are protected and children receive some help at all stages of their journey. Early help prevents some children's situations escalating into child protection concerns. The views of children, young people and their families inform the help that they experience. ■ Leadership and governance arrangements ensure that children and young people are protected and that they receive some help at all stages of their journey. Early help and intervention services are available and accessible. Leaders know and understand the strengths and weaknesses of their services and those in the partnership, and are taking action to improve where appropriate. Performance information is used effectively to inform learning and development. ■ Opportunities are taken for learning and the development of practice, although this might not be systematically embedded. |
| <p>Grade 4: Inadequate</p> | <p>The overall effectiveness judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, or if there are significant systemic failures and, as a result, children and young people are inadequately protected and/or at risk of significant harm.</p> |

The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, and their families and carers

7. To make their judgement, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:
- children and young people are protected, risks are managed and the help provided reduces the risk of, or actual, harm to them
 - children, young people and their families feel that they have been effectively helped
 - children, young people and their families understand the intentions of the help and protection they receive
 - the help and protection received is responsive to the child, young person and family's ethnicity, culture, religion, language or disability
 - there is an early help offer that reflects the needs of the population and is accessible
 - the help and protection of children and young people is well coordinated between agencies, proportionate, meets children's needs and is provided early in the emergence of a problem at any stage in their lives
 - the help given is proportionate to risk; children and families are not subjected unnecessarily to formal child protection processes.

Grade descriptors: The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, and their families and carers

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| <p>Grade 1: Outstanding</p> | <p>The effectiveness of help and protection is likely to be outstanding if the requirements for a good judgement are met and, in addition, there are examples of highly effective help and protection, such as the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Children and young people at risk of harm are identified and protected and, in all cases, their needs are responded to in an effective and purposeful way. ■ Early help is effective in identifying and improving outcomes for particularly hard to reach groups. ■ Innovative practice leads to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people. ■ Multi-agency working is of an exceptionally high quality and ensures that children, young people and families can easily access coordinated help that makes a significant difference. ■ There is evidence of sustained positive outcomes and a significantly reducing need for further intervention for children and young people, as a consequence of the help and protection they receive. |
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| <p>Grade 2: Good</p> | <p>The effectiveness of the help and protection is likely to be good if all the requirements for an adequate judgement are met and some of those requirements are exceeded, in addition to the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Children, young people and their families clearly understand the intentions of the help they receive. ■ Most children, young people and their families feel that they have been effectively helped. ■ Multi-agency services are effective in offering help and working together to protect children. ■ The help and protection given to children and young people is equally accessible and robust, irrespective of the ethnicity, culture, religion, language or disability of the child, young person and family. ■ Services are well coordinated, proportionate, and are provided early in the emergence of a problem at any stage in their lives. ■ There is a diverse and wide ranging early help offer that is accessible and reflects the needs of the population. ■ Early help enables children and young people to develop in line with their peers and to access similar life experiences, such as maintaining attendance and learning at school. |
| <p>Grade 3: Adequate</p> | <p>The effectiveness of the help and protection judgement is likely to be adequate if the following apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Children and young people at risk of harm are identified and protected and, in the majority of cases, their needs are responded to in an effective and purposeful way. ■ Risks are well assessed and well managed. ■ There are no cases identified in which children are currently at risk of, or suffering, significant harm as a result of systemic deficits in practice or management. ■ The majority of children, young people and their families feel that they have been effectively helped. ■ Early help is available and accessible. ■ The help and protection received is sensitive and responsive to ethnicity, culture, religion, language or disability. ■ As a consequence of the early help offered, circumstances have improved and, in some cases, the need for targeted services has reduced or been avoided. ■ Agencies work together effectively to provide help to children and young people in need of protection. ■ The help given is proportionate to risk; children and families are not subjected unnecessarily to formal child protection processes. |

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| Grade 4: Inadequate | <p>The effectiveness of the help and protection judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, or there are significant failures in the effectiveness of the help and protection provided and, as a result, children and young people receive ineffective early help and/or are inadequately protected.</p> |
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The quality of practice

8. To make their judgement, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:
- children and young people who are the subject of concern are consistently seen and seen alone by a social worker who builds an effective relationship with the child
 - children and young people are listened to and heard, and practice is focused on their experiences, including their feedback about the effectiveness of the help at all stages of their journey
 - universal services, including those providing early help, make appropriate referrals for children and young people to social care
 - social work expertise and advice is available to other professionals to support them in determining whether a referral should be made to children's social care
 - management oversight of social work practice includes supervision that is effective, robust, systematic, challenging, and recorded
 - thresholds for access to services are clear, understood and implemented locally by all professionals working with children, young people and families
 - there is an effective and timely response to referrals and contacts, including out of hours
 - section 47 enquiries are thorough and timely and always carried out by a qualified and suitably experienced social worker; findings in relation to significant harm are clear
 - assessments, including common assessments, are timely, effective and result in a direct offer of help or appropriate protection where appropriate
 - help and protection is the subject of a clear, outcome-focused plan that is shared with, and understood by, the family and regularly reviewed
 - decision making within children's social care is undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced social work staff and/or managers, as appropriate, and those decisions are recorded effectively
 - case recording is coherent, timely, reflects the work undertaken and the outcomes achieved, and includes an up to date case chronology

- information sharing between agencies and professionals is timely, specific and effective
- multi-agency case conferences, strategy meetings and core groups are effective
- children, young people and families have access to the services of an advocate where appropriate.

Grade descriptors: The quality of practice

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| <p>Grade 1: Outstanding</p> | <p>The quality of practice judgement is likely to be outstanding if all the requirements for a good judgement are met or exceeded, in addition to the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In almost all cases, practice is consistently of a high standard and exceptionally child-centred. ■ There are a range of instances of highly effective practice that contribute to significantly improved protection outcomes for children and young people. ■ Social work practice is confident and secure, and is well informed by evidence, learning from practice, and contemporary theory research. ■ Management oversight is consistently challenging and results in reflective practice and learning. |
| <p>Grade 2: Good</p> | <p>The quality of practice judgement is likely to be good if all the requirements for an adequate judgement are met and some of those requirements are exceeded, in addition to the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Social workers develop effective and ongoing relationships with children and young people as the medium for their work. ■ Thresholds are well embedded and are reviewed and updated regularly. ■ Children, young people and families are kept informed about all actions and decisions being taken. ■ There is effective management oversight, monitoring, risk assessment and decision making in almost all work with children and families. ■ In almost all cases, assessments are timely, of high quality, and result in a direct offer of help or appropriate protection where appropriate. ■ Almost all case recording is coherent, timely, reflects the work undertaken, is clear about the reasons for decisions, including decisions not to take actions, and includes an up to date case chronology. ■ Recording clearly demonstrates outcomes for children and young people. ■ Plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues. ■ Most multi-agency case conferences, strategy meetings and core groups are consistently attended by key participants and are effective forums for information sharing, planning, and informed and risk-based decision making. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Children, young people and families have access to the services of an advocate where appropriate. |
| <p>Grade 3: Adequate</p> | <p>The quality of practice judgement is likely to be adequate if the following apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Children who are the subject of concern are consistently seen alone by a social worker. ■ Practice is focused on the experiences of children and young people, and informed by their wishes and feelings. ■ Work with children and families is explained to, and understood by, them in the majority of cases. ■ Social work staff receive regular and effective supervision that is focused on their work with children, young people and families. ■ There is effective management oversight, monitoring, risk assessment and decision making in most work with children and families. ■ Locally agreed thresholds for access to services for children in need of protection are understood across agencies. ■ Social work expertise and advice is available to other professionals to support them in determining whether a referral should be made to children's social care. ■ Universal, preventative, and non-social care refer children and young people to social care in a timely and effective manner. ■ There is a timely response to referrals, which enables children and young people to get the help and protection they need. ■ The management of, and response to, referrals concerning children and young people who live in households where at least one parent or carer misuses substances or suffers from mental ill health, or where there is domestic violence, is timely and facilitates early help and protection. ■ Section 47 enquiries are thorough and timely and always carried out by a qualified and suitably experienced social worker. Findings in relation to significant harm are clear. ■ In the majority of cases, assessments (including common assessments) are timely and result in a direct offer of help or appropriate protection where appropriate. ■ Assessment and planning addresses children's physical, social, emotional and/or educational needs, including supporting their attendance and progression at school and their capacity to learn. ■ Planning is outcome-focused and the progress and impact is measurable and reviewed. ■ Decision making is undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced social work staff and/or managers, as appropriate, and those decisions are recorded effectively. ■ The majority of case recording is coherent, timely, reflects the work undertaken, is clear about the reasons for decisions, including decisions not to take actions, and includes an up to date case chronology. ■ Information sharing between agencies and professionals is timely, |

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| | <p>specific, effective and, where necessary, is the subject of consent to that sharing by the family concerned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In the majority of cases, multi-agency case conferences, strategy meetings and core groups are consistently attended by key participants and are effective forums for information sharing, planning, and informed and risk-based decision making. ■ Response to children and young people at immediate risk of harm is effective at all times, including out of normal office hours. |
| Grade 4: Inadequate | The quality of practice judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, or if there are significant failures and, as a result, children and young people are inadequately protected and/or at risk of significant harm. |

Leadership and governance

9. This encompasses leadership and governance within the local authority, through both elected members and officers, and at both corporate and departmental levels, and through the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). It will evaluate how effectively the local authority leads partnership working in relation to early help and child protection, and the effectiveness and capacity of leadership in achieving and sustaining improvement.
10. To make their judgement, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:
 - local strategic leaders prioritise, identify and implement ambitious strategies in relation to the provision of child protection services, including early help services
 - there is an effective shared local strategy to help and protect children and young people
 - there are clear accountabilities and responsibilities between the LSCB, the Director of Children’s Services, the Chief Executive, the Lead Member for Children’s Services, and all other partners
 - the LSCB meets its statutory duties and is effective
 - performance management and evaluation is effective
 - the local authority and its partners understand their key strengths and areas for development and take appropriate action
 - senior and middle managers exercise robust management oversight and are effective in tackling weaknesses and overcoming barriers to improvement
 - staff, at all levels, work in a culture of challenge, support and improvement
 - feedback from children, young people, families and front line staff, both individually and collectively, is taken into account and, where appropriate, impacts on strategy, service development and design

- there is effective and continuous learning from a range of sources, including complaints, serious case reviews and audits, peer review and challenge, inspection findings and research
- there is effective workforce planning, including planning to meet the needs of the local community and to reflect its diversity.

Grade descriptors: Leadership and governance

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| <p>Grade 1: Outstanding</p> | <p>The leadership and governance judgement is likely to be outstanding if all the requirements for a good judgement are met, in addition to the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The effectiveness of the local authority's leadership is recognised by partners as driving improvement across the whole system. ■ There is clear evidence of a shared priority to delivering effective help and protection to all children at risk of harm, given by all agencies and services, and this is translated into action. ■ There is a shared and effective approach to performance management and improvement across all agencies. ■ All agencies and services work together as a single system to drive improvement in the effective protection of and help for children and young people and in improving outcomes for them. |
| <p>Grade 2: Good</p> | <p>The leadership and governance judgement is likely to be good if all the requirements for an adequate judgement are met and some of those requirements are exceeded, in addition to the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is active and visible leadership and commitment from the Leader or Mayor of the Council, from the Chief Executive, and from the Lead Member for Children's Services. ■ Leadership, at all levels, is active and visible. ■ Senior managers personally scrutinise and audit practice on a regular basis. ■ The local authority and its partners have a consistent track record of sustained improvement and are able to sustain those improvements. ■ There is a robust and up to date joint strategic needs assessment, which informs effective strategic commissioning, both by the local authority and through joint commissioning. ■ The strategy includes a clearly articulated and deliverable early help offer. ■ The LSCB provides effective challenge to all partner agencies, which drives improvement. ■ Elected members champion the needs of children and young people and respond proactively and effectively to their needs. ■ The local authority can demonstrate that feedback from children, young people and families, and from staff, both |

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| | <p>individually and collectively, impacts appropriately on strategy, service development and design.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Effective workforce planning addresses staffing requirements to meet the needs of the local community and to reflect its diversity. ■ Resource deficits are understood and risk assessed and appropriate action is taken. ■ Leaders are effective in tackling weaknesses and overcoming barriers to improvement. ■ Management information is used effectively and the local authority is responsive to changes and challenges; this is demonstrated in the priorities set and the progress made. ■ There are systematic mechanisms in place to feed back, act on, and evaluate the impact of learning from all sources. ■ There is effective and continuous learning from feedback from children, young people, families and carers, and from practitioners, and a range of other sources, including complaints, serious case reviews and audits, peer review and challenge, inspection findings and research. ■ Knowledge, learning and development are well embedded and demonstrate that staff increase their skills to effectively help and protect children and young people. |
| <p>Grade 3: Adequate</p> | <p>The leadership and governance judgement is likely to be adequate if the following apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Leaders prioritise, identify and implement strategies in relation to the commissioning and provision of child protection services, including early help services, which are clear about priorities and identify what needs to be done to secure improvement. ■ The shared local strategy: is based on established local need; includes the provision of a range of services for early help; is appropriately resourced; and is focused on the effectiveness of help that is provided and the difference that it makes to children and young people's lives. ■ There are clear accountabilities and responsibilities between the LSCB, the Director of Children's Services, the Chief Executive and the Lead Member for Children's Services, to ensure that sufficient and focused attention is given to children and young people who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse and neglect. ■ The LSCB has been effective in improving the quality of child protection practice across the system, and all key partners are committed to its work. ■ The LSCB ensures that multi-agency training is available and effective in improving the protection of children and young people. ■ Performance management and evaluation is established within the local authority and in partner agencies, and leads to |

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| | <p>improvements in keeping children and young people safe from harm, and in outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There are effective mechanisms in place for feedback from children, young people, families and front line staff, both individually and collectively. ■ There is an adequate supply of suitably experienced and competent social work and other staff, and effective arrangements for their training and development. ■ The local authority and its partners have an accurate understanding of their effectiveness and their key strengths and areas for development. ■ Staff feel supported, challenged and motivated to improve. ■ The authority can demonstrate some learning from the range of sources available. |
| <p>Grade 4: Inadequate</p> | <p>The leadership and governance judgement is likely to be inadequate if it fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement, and deficits in leadership and governance contribute to failure to provide effective help and protection for children.</p> |