

Staff Briefing – Inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS)

July 2018

A system - not a programme of inspections

Includes:

- annual self-evaluation of social work practice (SEF)
- 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)**
- Joint Targeted Area Inspections (multi-agency themed)

ILACS: An inspection system

- ILACS is a system, with each feature informing 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	Up to two focused visits in between inspections	Up to two focused visits in between inspections
Annual conversation	Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit)	Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit)
Shared self-evaluation	Annual conversation	Annual conversation
	Shared self-evaluation	Shared self-evaluation

Activities outside of inspection

SELF-EVALUATION AND ANNUAL
ENGAGEMENT

Self-evaluation

- No set format, but should be brief and answer three questions:
 - 1. What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice with children and families in your authority?**
 - 2. How do you know it?**
 - 3. What are your plans to maintain or improve practice?**

Annual engagement meeting

- We will discuss self-evaluation, data and intelligence.
- Will be an honest and open conversation
- Help consider any future focused visit and how this might support the LA's improvement plans
- Will not have a published 'outcome' – Ofsted will write to the DCS summarising the discussion

Benefits of the extra contact

- Support 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 the best time for a visit/inspections
- **Provide Ofsted with evidence that we 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.

Focused visits

Focused visit scope

- Will be of a particular area of service or cohort of children
- Will usually have discussed the scope and information request with the LA at their annual engagement meeting
- We may adjust the criteria or information request to reflect local context and the specific scope
- Use focused visits to evaluate and highlight good practice and areas of concern

Judgements and report

- No graded judgments
- Narrative letter, which will highlight:
 - 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:
- **Work as single team or 'pack' and do one area at a time**
- 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 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 inspection

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

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

What do we know
about ourselves and
what does it mean for
us?

Self evaluation, staff engagement and external review

- Recently had a focussed visit on Careleavers
- Peer review support from Doncaster Children's Trust (6 days)
- Former HMI visits (3 days)
- Currently getting support from South Tyneside as Partners in Practice
- **All have given an external view of our practice and processes to allow us to make an informed view of what we need to prioritise in the way of improvements**

Management Grip - 5 key thematic areas for focus and improvement

Overall we have themed our areas for improvement under the header of **Management Grip** and focus in 5 key areas:

1. Quality of plans
2. Voice of the child
3. Supervision
4. Practice standards
5. Quality Assurance