



One minute guide

Ofsted Inspection Framework—Inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS)

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What is the ILACS framework?

In January 2018, Ofsted adopted the ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) [framework](#) for inspecting services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers. The framework outlines a system of inspection activity which focuses on the effectiveness of the following local authority services and arrangements:

- Help and protection of children, enabling families to stay together with the help they need;
- The experiences and progress of children in care - wherever they live, including those children who return home;
- The arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, in stable, loving homes, including adoption (the way inspectors evaluate adoption varies for each local authority, depending on arrangements in relation to [Regional Adoption Agencies](#)); and
- The experiences and progress of care leavers.

Inspectors also evaluate the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families, which includes the effectiveness of leaders and managers, as well as the quality of professional practice delivered by a workforce that is equipped and effective.

What is the ILACS inspection system?

Ofsted describes ILACS as a whole system of inspection which aims to apply a proportionate and risk-based approach. The system comprises the following:

Local authorities sharing an **annual self-evaluation** of the quality and impact of social work practice and any plans to maintain or improve quality;

An **annual engagement meeting** between a regional Ofsted representative and the local authority, which includes reviewing the self-assessment;

Ofsted's **local authority intelligence system** (LAIS) of data and information;

Focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children. Reports from Leeds's focused visits in 2018 and 2021 are available from [our Ofsted page](#);

Standard inspections for local authorities judged to require improvement and **short inspections** for local authorities judged to be good or outstanding. Short inspections start with the assumption that the local authority is good or outstanding, seeking to explore whether the quality and impact of practice has been maintained, as well as identifying any areas of improvement or deterioration. Standard/ short inspections usually take place every three years (plus or minus six months). Leeds was inspected in 2022 and judged to be 'Outstanding' overall ([see report](#)). Reports with judgements are published for both short and standard inspections;

Joint targeted area inspections (JTAI) - multi-agency inspections on changing themes, including [exploitation](#), [neglect](#) and [domestic abuse](#). Leeds was subject to a themed JTAI in 2024 on serious youth violence ([see report](#)). Inspectorates also carry out JTAIs into the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk; this is what local authorities and partners may refer to as '[front door arrangements](#)' for children's social work and early help services. The process, timescales, requirements and methodology of JTAIs are outlined in separate inspection frameworks, but they remain part of the ILACS system.

How are standard and short inspections carried out?

The inspections are unannounced and begin when the Lead Inspector makes a phone call to the Director of Children's Services to notify them that inspectors will be on site the following Monday. Following the call, the local authority shares data on children, information about audits, and performance and management information which inspectors review offsite. The deadlines for providing this information are tight, and inspectors will use the information we send to develop some of their key lines of enquiry, and to select the cases of children and young people they want to look at more closely during the inspection.

Usually there will be four social care inspectors onsite over a two week period for standard inspections, and one week for short inspections. Inspections start with a set-up meeting with the Director of Children's Services and her team, where they can give some information about the context of children and families in Leeds.

In previous inspection programmes, inspections have followed 'the journey of the child' starting with the [front door](#), then help and protection, children in care and care leavers. Under ILACS, the evidence gathering may start at a different place, influenced by known strengths and weaknesses; for example, those identified from an annual engagement meeting or a focused visit. Other factors that may influence evidence gathering include the geography of the local authority and where teams are located.

For standard and short inspections, what do the inspectors do?

Almost all inspection evidence is gathered by looking at individual children and young people's experiences, largely through meeting with practitioners to understand the nature and impact of their work and scrutinising electronic records. Inspectors will base their judgements on contemporary practice; usually the six months before the inspection, although they may need to consider earlier practice to understand the child's journey.

Inspectors will discuss the selected 'deep dive' cases with practitioners, as well as engaging with practitioners through shadowing their day-to-day work. When talking to social workers about practice, inspectors will ask about a range of issues such as: quality and impact of supervision; how they are helped to strengthen families and minimise risk; workload; and availability, quality and impact of training and development. Inspectors will also - where appropriate - observe practice in multi- or single-agency meetings.

Where possible, inspectors will talk to children and young people. They are interested in discussing their experiences with services as well as hearing how children's rights are considered, how their entitlements are realised and about how local pledges or charters are fulfilled in practice. In addition, inspectors may meet with foster carers—either an established group or a group identified through an open invitation to meet inspectors.

Inspectors triangulate evidence by talking to practitioners and/ or managers and service providers as required. When evaluating services for children subject to care, supervision and adoption proceedings, inspectors may contact [CAFCASS](#) (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) and the local judiciary.

Key contacts and for more information

Inspection planning activity is coordinated by the Capacity and Change team. You can email them at csimprovement@leeds.gov.uk.

The ILACS framework is available [here](#), and all reports from previous inspections in Leeds are available [here](#).