



One minute guide

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

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What is the ILACS framework?

From January 2018, Ofsted adopted a new framework for inspecting local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers. The framework, Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), is available from the [Ofsted](#) website. In line with previous inspections, the framework focuses on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements for:

- the help and protection of children;
- 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, including adoption;
- the experiences and progress of care leavers.

There is also a refocused attention on assessing the effectiveness of leadership and management and the impact this has on the lives of children and the quality of practice.

What is the ILACS inspection system?

Ofsted describes the ILACS approach as a whole system of inspection which aims to apply a proportionate and risk based approach. Ofsted use intelligence and information to decide how best to inspect each local authority. 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 reviews the self-assessment;

Ofsted's **local authority interactive tool** (LAIT) comprising data and information;

Focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children. Leeds had a focused visit in January 2018 and the published outcome letter is available from [here](#);

Standard inspections for local authorities judged to require improvement and **short inspections** for local authorities judged to be good or outstanding. Timing will usually be between six months before and six months after the three year anniversary of the previous inspection. Leeds was inspected in 2018 and judged to be 'Outstanding' overall with ([see report](#)) and thus can expect to receive a short inspection. Reports with judgements are published for both short and standard inspections;

Joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) - multi-agency inspections on changing themes. There are other One Minute Guides on JTAI inspections (domestic violence/ abuse, neglect, child exploitation, child sexual abuse in the family environment, children with mental ill health).

How are standard and short inspections be carried out?

The inspections are unannounced and begin when the Lead Inspector makes a phone call to the Director of Children's Services to say 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.

Usually there will be four social care inspectors onsite over a two week period for standard inspections and one week for short inspections. There will also be a social care regulatory inspector on site for up to two days and a schools inspector on site for one day.

Inspections start with a set-up meeting with the Director of Children's Services.

In previous inspection programmes, inspections have followed 'the journey of the child' starting with the Front Door ([guide](#)), then help and protection, children in care and then finally care leavers. For standard and short inspections this might not always be the approach Ofsted will take.

Under ILACS, the evidence gathering may start at a different place. This may be influenced by previous known strengths and weaknesses including from information gained from an annual engagement meeting, focused visit or JTAI, for example. Other factors that may influence this 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.

Where possible, inspectors will talk to children and young people although these discussions will not always be fact to face; they are interested in hearing how children's rights are considered, how their entitlements are realised and about their experiences of local pledges or charters in practice, for example, in Leeds, [The Promise](#) for children looked after ([guide](#)).

In addition, inspectors may meet with a group of foster carers—either an established group or a group identified through an open invitation to meet the inspection team.

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 ([guide](#)) and the local judiciary.

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.

Key contacts and for more information

Within Children and Families Services, inspection planning activity is coordinated through the Improvement Hub. csimprovement@leeds.gov.uk