

The framework for children's centre inspection

The framework for inspecting Sure Start Children's Centres in England under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 (as amended by the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009)

This framework sets out the statutory basis for Sure Start Children's Centre inspections conducted from April 2013. It summarises the main features of children's centre inspections and describes how the general principles and processes of inspection are applied to single centres and children's centre groups with integrated services that share leadership and management.

Age group: 0-5

Published: April 2014

Reference no: 130057



Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

361

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

No. 130057

© Crown copyright 2015



Contents

Introduction	4
What is the purpose of a children’s centre inspection?	4
How does inspection promote improvement?	4
Key features of the framework for children’s centre inspection from April 2013	5
Part A. Inspection policy and principles	5
What are the legal requirements for the inspection of children’s centres?	5
What determines the timing of a children’s centre inspection?	6
What are the principles of children’s centre inspection?	7
What is the relationship between self-evaluation and inspection?	9
Who inspects children’s centres?	9
The inspection grades inspectors use when making judgements	10
Part B. The focus of children’s centre inspections	10
The key judgements made during children’s centre inspections	10
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management	12
Part C. The process of inspection	14
What happens before the inspection?	14
What happens during the inspection?	15
How do the centre’s leader and senior staff engage in the inspection?	17
What happens after the inspection?	20
Annex A. Terminology	22

Introduction

What is the purpose of a children's centre¹ inspection?

1. The inspection of a children's centre provides an independent external evaluation of its effectiveness and what it should do to improve. This is based upon a range of evidence including that from partner organisations, parents and prospective parents who use the centre and its services, and inspectors' first-hand observation.
2. Ofsted's inspections of children's centres:
 - keep the Secretary of State for Education informed about the work of children's centres and their impact on improving outcomes for young children and their families
 - keep local authorities, as the responsible authorities, informed about the quality of their children's centres
 - provide parents² and prospective parents in the community in which the centre is located with information about the centre.

How does inspection promote improvement?

3. Ofsted is required to carry out its work in ways that encourage the services it inspects and regulates to improve, to be user-focused and to be efficient and effective in the use of resources.³
4. Ofsted inspection acts in a number of ways to drive and support children's centre improvement. Ofsted inspection:
 - raises expectations by setting the standards of performance and effectiveness expected of children's centres
 - provides a sharp challenge and the impetus to act where improvement is needed
 - clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses
 - recommends specific priorities for action that should be taken by the local authority and centre's staff to improve the children's centre
 - promotes rigour in the way local authorities evaluate the performance of their children's centres thereby enhancing the capacity of the local authority and of individual centres to improve the services being offered.

¹ This document uses the term children's centre to describe a Sure Start Children's Centre as defined in Part 1 section 5A (4) of the Childcare Act 2006 (as amended by the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009).

² The term 'parents' refers to mothers, fathers and/or carers.

³ Sections 117(1) and 119(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Key features of the framework for children's centre inspection from April 2013

5. Inspectors focus sharply on the impact of children's centres on targeted young children and their families, especially those that centres have identified as being in most need of intervention and support. They make three key judgements that contribute to a judgement on the overall effectiveness of the centre. The three key judgements are:
 - access to services by young children and their families
 - the quality and impact of practice and services
 - the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management.
6. Under this framework:
 - an inspection will either be of a single centre or of a children's centre group that offers integrated services and shares leadership and management
 - wherever possible and appropriate, inspections will take place simultaneously across a locality⁴ where local authorities or partner organisations deliver integrated services collaboratively
 - a centre that is not yet 'good', but that is not judged 'inadequate', is a centre that 'requires improvement'
 - centres that are judged as 'requires improvement' will normally be inspected within a maximum period of two years and earlier if required.
 - if a centre is judged as 'requires improvement' at two consecutive inspections and is still not 'good' at a third inspection, it is likely to be deemed 'inadequate'
 - a centre judged as inadequate will be re-inspected within 12 months of the previous inspection – the quality of the action plan produced by the local authority in response to the inspection and its implementation will be an important feature of the re-inspection.

Part A. Inspection policy and principles

What are the legal requirements for the inspection of children's centres?

7. This framework sets out the statutory basis for children's centre inspection⁵ conducted under the Childcare Act 2006 from April 2013. It should be read in

⁴ For inspection purposes a locality is defined as a geographical area that is usually a smaller unit than the local authority as a whole (unless it is a very small unitary authority).

⁵ Children's centre inspections are governed by Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by Part 9 of the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

conjunction with the *Children's centre inspection handbook*.⁶ It applies to all children's centres provided under arrangements made by an English local authority. This includes all centres managed directly by local authorities⁷ and those that a local authority commissions on its behalf. Centres will be inspected as:

- a children's centre group:⁸ a children's centre group has shared leadership and management and integrated services; although it will consist of several centres, it will be inspected as one children's centre
- single centres: these may work entirely independently of other centres or may work collaboratively, sharing a range of services in a given geographical area or locality.⁹

8. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is not able, under current legislation, to require children's centres to pay for inspections.

What determines the timing of a children's centre inspection?

9. Ofsted must inspect all children's centres within a set interval that is prescribed in regulations as five years,¹⁰ or sooner where the Secretary of State for Education requires this.

10. The inspection arrangements will ensure that the frequency of inspection is proportionate to the performance and circumstances of children's centres. This means that some centres will be inspected more frequently than others.

11. Where HMCI or the Secretary of State have concerns about the performance of a children's centre, HMCI has powers to inspect at any time under section 98A (2) of the Childcare Act. Under section 98A (1) (b), HMCI may also be required by the Secretary of State to conduct an inspection of a children's centre.

12. Centres may be inspected more frequently than others where HMCI or the Secretary of State have concerns about a children's centre's performance and consider that it would be appropriate for it to be inspected.

13. Centres may be inspected, for example, where:

- the findings of the previous inspection(s) are that the centre is not yet good or is inadequate

⁶ *Children's centre inspection handbook* (130056); Ofsted, 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130056.

⁷ Children's centres are defined in section 5A (4) Childcare Act 2006 as amended.

⁸ See Annex A for the definition of a children's centre group.

⁹ A locality is a geographical area that is usually a smaller unit than the local authority as a whole (unless the local authority is a very small unitary authority). See Annex A for a more detailed explanation.

¹⁰ The Children's Centres (Inspections) Regulations 2010, Statutory Instruments 2010, No 1173.

- safeguarding and/or welfare concerns suggest that it should be inspected earlier
 - a linked inspection, for example of registered early years provision or a subject or thematic survey inspection carried out by Ofsted since the last routine inspection raises concerns
 - Ofsted has received a concern relating to directly-provided registered childcare and/or a qualifying complaint about a maintained nursery within a children's centre, which, taken alongside other available evidence, suggests that it would be appropriate to inspect the centre
 - any other significant concerns are brought to Ofsted's attention
 - it becomes part of a formal children's centre group and the group has not yet been inspected; or it leaves such a group; or it works collaboratively across a locality and it is considered appropriate to inspect the centres at the same time.
14. Inspection can take place at any point in a year as children's centres are expected to offer access to services across all 12 months. In exceptional circumstances, as specified in Ofsted's deferral policy,¹¹ an inspection might be cancelled or deferred after it has been notified to the centre, following a request made by the centre or local authority. Normally, however, if the centre is open an inspection will go ahead even if, for example, the centre leader is off site or building work is taking place.

What are the principles of children's centre inspection?

15. Children's centre inspection acts in the interests of young children, their parents and prospective parents. It encourages high-quality provision that meets the diverse needs of target families and fosters equal opportunities.
16. Children's centre inspections will:
- support and promote improvement by
 - establishing a clear standard for the impact of centres – only a 'good' centre is good enough
 - adjusting the focus and type of inspection to have the greatest impact
 - clearly identifying strengths and weaknesses
 - identifying precise actions to underpin recommendations
 - explaining and discussing inspection findings with those whose work has been inspected
 - providing challenge to senior leaders, staff, key partners and those responsible for governance including local authorities

¹¹ The deferral policy is available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/deferral-of-inspections-information-for-childrens-centres>.

- be proportionate by
 - adjusting the frequency of inspection having regard to previous inspection outcomes and risk assessment
 - deploying resources where improvement is most needed, or where inspection can add most value
- focus on users' needs by
 - taking account of user views in the planning and conduct of inspection
 - drawing on user views to inform inspectors' judgements and the outcomes of inspection
 - minimising risk to young children and their families by evaluating the effectiveness of centres' procedures for safeguarding
 - evaluating the extent to which centres provide an inclusive environment which meets the needs of target families irrespective of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation
- focus on the needs of centres by
 - providing high-quality and timely communication with centres and local authorities and any private, voluntary or independent providers commissioned to manage children's centres on the behalf of the local authority
 - making use, as far as possible, of the existing data, documentation and systems of the centres inspected and avoiding placing unnecessary burdens on them
 - taking account of centres' self-evaluation
- be transparent and consistent by
 - making clear and transparent judgements based on sound evidence
 - inspecting and reporting with integrity
 - having clear evaluation criteria, procedures and guidance that are well understood by centres, local authorities and users and that are readily available
- be accountable by
 - reporting the outcomes of inspection without fear or favour
 - publishing clear, accurate, timely reports that provide parents and prospective parents with an authoritative, independent assessment of the quality of the centre
 - gathering the views of users and those who have a significant interest in the centre, including key partners, to inform inspection
- demonstrate value for money by

- targeting inspection resources and deploying them effectively and efficiently
- evaluating the outcomes and processes of inspection and making improvements where necessary.

What is the relationship between self-evaluation and inspection?

17. Self-evaluation provides the basis for planning, development and improvement in centres. Inspection takes full account of, and contributes to, a centre's self-evaluation. Centre leaders may present an up-to-date brief verbal summary of their self-evaluation to inspectors as part of their pre-inspection meeting, subject to agreement with the lead inspector.

Who inspects children's centres?

18. Children's centre inspections are carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), employed directly by Ofsted, and additional inspectors employed directly, or contracted, by inspection service providers (ISPs). ISPs are independent commercial organisations contracted by Ofsted to provide inspection services, and are responsible for the administrative arrangements for inspections. Ofsted prescribes the qualifications and experience required by additional inspectors, the initial and continuing training that they should receive, and the standards they are required to meet. All inspectors undertake regular training to ensure that they are familiar with changes in inspection frameworks, inspection methodology and developments in children's centre policy and practice.
19. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) lead a proportion of inspections. Additional inspectors, who lead inspections, are authorised to do so subject to the additional inspector having previously conducted a children's centre inspection to the satisfaction of an HMI. Ofsted also quality assures inspections by visiting a sample of centres during inspection and reviewing a sample of inspection evidence and inspection reports.

The inspection grades inspectors use when making judgements

20. When judging the overall effectiveness of the children's centre and when making the three key judgements about access to services, the quality and impact of services, and the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management of the centre, inspectors will use the following scale:
- grade 1: outstanding
 - grade 2: good
 - grade 3: requires improvement
 - grade 4: inadequate.

Part B. The focus of children's centre inspections

The key judgements made during children's centre inspections

21. The evaluation schedule, which is published as part of the *Children's centre inspection handbook*,¹² provides guidance to local authorities, centres and inspectors about the key judgements that inspectors make during the course of an inspection.

Overall effectiveness

22. Inspectors evaluate the quality and impact of the children's centre. The overall effectiveness judgement takes into account the three key judgements.
23. To reach an overall judgement, inspectors will consider whether the centre is meeting its legal requirements in making sufficient early childhood services available to parents and prospective parents in its reach area/locality, including the activities it offers on site. Inspectors will also consider the difference the centre makes to the young children and families in the local area it serves.
24. When coming to this judgement, inspectors must also consider:
- the effectiveness with which the centre makes arrangements for targeted families to access the services they need in order to improve children's well-being
 - the quality of universal and targeted services and the impact they have on outcomes for young children and their families
 - the effectiveness of governance, leadership and management in monitoring performance and making sufficient resources available to meet the needs of young children and targeted families in the area.

¹² *Children's centre inspection handbook* (130056); Ofsted 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130056.

25. Where the inspection is of a children's centre group, inspectors must consider any differences in access to, or the quality of, provision and services across the different centres in the group. Inspectors must also consider the impact of these services on the overall needs of families across the group's reach area/locality.
26. Where the inspection includes consideration of shared services across a number of centres working collaboratively, inspectors must take into account how each individual centre identifies the families that need the shared services and how it helps families to access those services.

Access to services by young children and families

27. This judgement deals with how centres identify families with young children in their community, the early childhood services those families need and how those that are in most need of services are helped and encouraged to participate in them. Particular emphasis is paid to families who are in most need of intervention and support who may be unlikely or unwilling to access the help they need.
28. When making their judgements inspectors must consider the extent to which the centre:
 - works with partners to identify all the families with young children in its area
 - establishes and maintains contact with targeted families in its area
 - has identified the target groups¹³ and individual families most in need of intervention and support, the specific nature of their needs and the universal and specialist services needed to support them
 - prioritises families that need support appropriately
 - uses outreach work to identify target groups and encourage those families who would otherwise be unlikely to access services the centre has to offer
 - provides or facilitates arrangements for targeted children to take up the free entitlement to early education, especially two-year-olds from disadvantaged families
 - provides or facilitates access to universal activities and relevant services for targeted families, and monitors how many families use them and continue to use them until their needs have been effectively met.

The quality and impact of practice and services

29. Inspectors must consider the planning, integration and implementation of activities and services, including the extent to which some services are available

¹³ See Annex A for an explanation of 'target groups'.

to all families and others are targeted at those in most need. They will also evaluate the impact of activities and services provided by the centre and those to which the centre signposts parents including the effectiveness of the centre's support and intervention strategies for families that are most in need.

30. When making their judgements inspectors must consider:

- the effectiveness of partnerships with early years providers, schools, health services, adult training services and employment services in providing the activities and services required to achieve agreed outcomes for targeted families
- whether the services are appropriate and relevant to the needs of targeted families, taking account of how they are decided upon, planned, the intended outcomes and how these will be measured
- the quality and impact of services in improving outcomes, or sustaining already very good outcomes, in the following areas:
 - the readiness of target children for school
 - improved parenting
 - opportunities for target adults to participate in activities that improve their personal skills, education and employability
 - the development of healthy lifestyles for target children and their families
 - parents' understanding of their responsibilities for their children's safety and well-being
- the effectiveness of any intervention and prevention work in protecting target children and securing their well-being
- any follow-up work and/or tracking¹⁴ of children and their targeted families
- how well practitioners work with target children and parents, are good role models and have sufficiently high expectations and aspirations
- the effectiveness of the care, guidance and support that the centre and its partners provide
- how the centre facilitates opportunities to volunteer, to contribute to the running of the centre and to develop formal and informal networks of support.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

31. Inspectors will evaluate how efficiently and effectively the centre is managed. They will examine the impact of leaders at all levels, including that of

¹⁴ Tracking refers to the actions and strategies leaders and managers employ to monitor the effectiveness and impact of the centre's work.

governors, the local authority and any private, voluntary or independent provider the local authority has commissioned to run the centre on its behalf.

32. When evaluating the quality of leadership, governance and management, inspectors must consider:
- how well evidence and robust data are used to set and agree on performance and outcome measures that can reduce inequalities and improve the lives of target families
 - the challenge provided by local authorities and how this contributes to improved performance
 - the effectiveness of strategic partnerships, including any service level agreements or joint and collaborative working
 - the rigour and effectiveness of self-evaluation systems used to inform the centre's priorities and to set challenging targets for improvement; this includes how any information from complaints is used to drive up service improvement
 - the extent to which staff delivering the centre's services are appropriately qualified and drawn from a range of professional backgrounds and the effectiveness of systems for their supervision, performance management and continuous professional development
 - the quality and effectiveness of the centre's training plan including the extent to which continuous professional development and performance management are linked to centre priorities
 - the effectiveness of the policies, procedures and practices in place, including those for staff recruitment, vetting and safeguarding
 - the effectiveness of monitoring to ensure the removal of any perceived inequalities and/or barriers to the engagement of target families
 - the extent to which target families contribute to the centre's performance and delivery, for example through advisory boards
 - how well target families' views are taken into account to improve access and to shape services
 - the extent to which resources are used effectively and efficiently to meet agreed local priorities and the needs of targeted children and families
 - the extent to which those targeted parents who have accessed the centre's services and achieved positive outcomes are helped to encourage other parents to use the centre's services.

Part C. The process of inspection

What happens before the inspection?

Scheduling of inspections

33. Ofsted may carry out inspections of children's centres simultaneously so that local authorities can demonstrate the impact of centres' work across a wide area. This is particularly important where centres work collaboratively. Simultaneous inspections will involve one or more inspection teams. The size and composition of an inspection team will depend on the number of centres being inspected in a locality and their reach area.¹⁵ An inspection of one single centre may also take place where Ofsted decides this is necessary.
34. Ofsted may seek to coordinate the inspection of children's centres with other provision such as a school or registered early years provision where this is appropriate and possible. Where such coordinated inspections take place, each school and/or provision will receive a separate inspection report.

When are children's centres notified of their inspection?

35. Centres will normally receive three working days' notice of an inspection. One of Ofsted's inspection service contractors will inform the centre that it is to be inspected. Ofsted has powers to inspect at any reasonable time and may arrange for an inspection of a centre to take place without notice where there are particular reasons, for example where there are safeguarding concerns or issues connected to children's welfare.

When do lead inspectors contact the centre?

36. The lead inspector will contact the centre leader or, in the absence of the centre leader, the most senior member of staff that is available as soon as possible after notification and always within 24 hours of the centre being made aware that it is to be inspected. Pre-inspection activities and telephone contact with the centre are intended to ensure that:
 - good communication and effective working relationships are established with the centre
 - senior leaders and staff, including those from partner agencies, together with families using the centre are encouraged to engage with the inspection process so that they understand the judgements being made
 - the demands on the centre are kept to a minimum
 - pre-inspection evidence is analysed thoroughly and discussed
 - the issues for the inspection are identified and discussed

¹⁵ The reach area is the number of families with young children living in the defined area served by the children's centres.

- arrangements including the programme of inspection activities for the inspection are agreed.

What information do inspectors use before the inspection?

37. Lead inspectors will normally carry out some of their preparation on site where they will read and analyse evidence that relates to the centre's self-evaluation and its performance. They will take full account of the centre's assessment of its own performance.
38. During the on-site preparation, the lead inspector will meet the centre leader and discuss the main inspection issues to be pursued. The lead inspector will also finalise the inspection programme, ensuring that it takes account of details about the centre's partners, managers and target families.

How do inspectors seek the views of families?

39. Once informed that an inspection is to take place, centres should take reasonable steps to notify families using the centre and partner agencies. Centres should also notify the local authority. If parents/prospective parents ask to see an inspector, the inspection team will do all it can to accommodate such requests.
40. During the inspection, inspectors will talk with families as well as children, where appropriate. Inspectors will also aim to talk with parents who hold representative responsibilities, for example as members of the centre's advisory board. Meetings with parents and children may take the form of one or more focus groups. In addition, inspectors will gather the views of families by observing a range of activities.

What happens during the inspection?

How many days do inspectors spend in the centre?

41. Inspections of individual centres serving up to 1,000 families do not normally last longer than two days and will typically involve two inspectors. Inspections of larger centres, children's centre groups with shared leadership and management arrangements, or simultaneous inspections across a locality involve a larger team and may be on site for a longer period of up to five days. The number of inspectors and/or the number of days varies according to the size and nature of the centre(s) and the services provided.

How do inspectors use their time during the inspection?

42. The time allocated to on-site inspection must be used mainly for gathering first-hand evidence in order to inform inspectors' judgements.
43. Inspectors will consider evidence from:
 - the centre's self-evaluation

- available data provided by the local authority, centre/s and partner agencies broken down to locality or reach area level; this includes performance indicators agreed with the local authority monitoring information about the services provided by the centre and its partners
 - inspections of the Early Years Foundation Stage of any early years setting provided directly by, or commissioned by, the centre
 - information supplied by the local authority.
44. In addition, inspectors will observe a range of activities taking place at the centre in linked venues and in outreach sessions.
45. While on site, inspectors may 'track' potentially vulnerable target children/families or particular target groups, giving attention to: how the centre has identified these groups and assessed their needs; the quality of services for the different target groups and how they are improving outcomes for these groups.
46. Inspectors will interview the local authority lead officer, the centre's leaders and managers and front-line staff including representatives from across the centre's partner agencies such as health visitors, those from employment services, those responsible for outreach work and the manager/s of any registered early years or childcare provision where applicable. Inspectors will also scrutinise the centre's policies and procedures including, at every inspection, those for safeguarding.
47. In addition, lead inspectors will take account of any external views of the centre's performance. This includes the local authority's evaluation of the centre's performance against its targets.
48. Information held by the centre must be made freely available for inspectors, and the centre must cooperate in the inspectors' task of gathering evidence.
49. Inspectors' evidence will inform judgements about the quality of the centre's work and the detailed recommendations for improvement.

How is evidence recorded?

50. During the inspection, inspectors will gather, analyse and record evidence and their judgements on evidence forms. The evidence forms, together with any briefings, plans or instructions prepared by the lead inspector, will contribute to the evidence base for the inspection. The lead inspector must compile and assure the quality of the evidence base.

How are judgements secured?

51. The lead inspector has the responsibility for ensuring that the inspection team agrees judgements about the centre, and that these are supported convincingly

by evidence. Judgements will be based on the best fit with the grade descriptors in the evaluation schedule.

52. Emerging findings will be discussed at regular intervals with the centre leader and, where appropriate, senior staff. The centre leader will be given every opportunity to provide further evidence.
53. The overall judgements will reflect all the evidence considered by the inspection team. Final judgements will be subject to moderation prior to publication of the report.

How do the centre's leader and senior staff engage in the inspection?

54. Inspection has the strongest impact on improvement when the centre leaders understand the evidence and findings that have led to the judgements. The lead inspector will therefore ensure that the centre leader and senior staff:
 - are represented by an appropriate person (this may be the centre leader or group leader for a group of centres that have shared leadership and management arrangements) at all team and feedback meetings
 - are kept up to date with how the inspection is proceeding
 - understand how the inspection team reaches its judgements
 - have opportunities to clarify how evidence is used to reach judgements
 - are given the opportunity to present additional evidence.
55. Centre leaders will be invited to:
 - give their views on the issues for inspection as part of the pre-inspection discussions
 - receive regular updates from the lead inspector
 - attend the inspection team meeting at the end of the inspection when final judgements are made
 - receive feedback at the start or end of each day of the inspection
 - discuss the inspectors' recommendations to ensure that these are understood.

What is the code of conduct for inspectors?

56. Inspectors are required to uphold the highest professional standards in their work and to ensure that everyone they encounter during inspections is treated fairly and with respect. These standards are assured through a code of conduct which is set out below.

Inspectors' code of conduct

Inspectors should:

- evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour
- evaluate provision in line with frameworks, national standards or requirements
- base all evaluations on clear and robust evidence
- have no connection with the provider which could undermine their objectivity
- report honestly and clearly, ensuring that judgements are fair and reliable
- carry out their work with integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy, respect and sensitivity
- endeavour to minimise the stress on those involved in the inspection
- act in the best interests and well-being of service users
- maintain purposeful and productive dialogue with those being inspected, and communicate judgements clearly and frankly
- respect the confidentiality of information, particularly about individuals and their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests
- take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues.

57. When inspectors meet families, staff, other service providers/partners and other stakeholders, every effort should be made to protect the origin of individuals' comments if they are used to pursue an issue further. However, there may be circumstances in which it is not possible to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewee. Additionally, inspectors have a duty to pass on disclosures which raise child protection or safeguarding issues and/or where serious misconduct or potential criminal activity is involved.

How should centre staff and staff from their partner organisations engage with inspectors?

58. To ensure that inspection is productive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and centres establish and maintain an appropriate working relationship based on courtesy and professional behaviour. Inspectors will always be expected to uphold the code of conduct. Ofsted also expects centres' staff to:

- apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with inspectors
- enable inspectors to conduct their visit in an open and honest way
- enable inspectors to evaluate the centre objectively against the framework

- provide evidence that will enable the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision
- work with inspectors to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
- ensure that the health and safety of inspectors is not prejudiced while they are on their premises
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the inspector or the inspection team
- draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors promptly and in a suitable manner
- understand the need of inspectors to observe practice and talk to staff and users without the presence of a manager.

What feedback do inspectors give during the inspection?

59. Inspectors will offer feedback to the centre leader and/or key contact and any staff the centre leader wishes to include (as agreed by the lead inspector) at the end of each day of the inspection. This feedback is intended to highlight any emerging key strengths and areas of weakness and to identify aspects to follow up the next day. It is also an opportunity for the centre to present additional evidence to support their self-evaluation.

How is the quality of inspection assured?

60. All inspectors are responsible for the quality of their work. Lead inspectors must ensure that inspections are carried out in accordance with the principles of inspection and the code of conduct. In addition, Ofsted monitors the quality of inspections through a range of formal processes. Some centres are visited by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors to assure the quality of the inspection. Their assessments are confidential to the inspectors concerned. In other cases, the inspection evidence base may be evaluated as part of quality assurance processes.
61. In the rare event that Ofsted has identified elements of the evidence base which are not sufficiently sound, an inspection and/or inspection report may be judged by Ofsted to be incomplete. In this situation the provider will be notified that the inspection is incomplete and that a further visit may be necessary, to make sure that enough evidence is gathered and secure the inspection judgements.
62. All centres will be invited to take part in a post-inspection survey so that the views of the centre leader, centre staff, professionals who work in partnership with the centre and users are obtained and contribute to the development of inspection.

What happens after the inspection?

What feedback is provided to the centre?

63. Formal feedback will be provided at the end of the inspection to the centre leader and/or key contact, the local authority lead officer and any others the centre leader/key contact wishes to invite. The judgements will be presented and any aspects that have been judged inadequate or outstanding (or where the judgement is different from that which the centre might have expected), explained.
64. Before leaving the centre, the lead inspector must ensure that the centre is clear:
- about the grades awarded for each judgement required under the evaluation schedule
 - that the grades awarded may be subject to change
 - that the main points provided orally in the formal feedback will be referred to in the text of the report
 - about the recommendations for improvement
 - about the procedures leading to the publication of the report
 - about the complaints procedure
 - where relevant, about the implications of the centre being judged as requiring improvement or inadequate.

What are the written outcomes of the inspection?

65. Following the inspection, the lead inspector will write a report setting out the main findings of the inspection. The findings should be consistent with those explained orally to the centre during the feedback. The centre or leader will normally receive the report to comment on factual accuracy within 10 days of the inspection.

How is the quality of inspection reports assured?

66. The lead inspector will provide a first draft of the report to Ofsted's quality assurance team and, following editing, the team will forward the report to the centre for a factual check. One working day will be allocated to the centre to comment on the draft, unless the centre receives an inadequate judgement, in which case five days will be allowed for comments.

When is the report issued?

67. The report will be published on our website (www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports) within 15 working days of the end of the inspection or 25 days in the case of the overall effectiveness of the children's centre being judged inadequate.

68. A copy of the children's centre report will be sent to the local authority and to the centre leader.
69. Ofsted will publish the report on its website five days after it has been sent to the local authority for distribution.
70. In exceptional circumstances Ofsted may decide that the normal period for completion of the inspection report should be extended.

What must the local authority do when the inspection report is received?

71. The local authority may choose to send a copy of the inspection report to all relevant parties. There is no legal definition of relevant parties but statutory guidance suggests these may include partner agencies, members of the centre's advisory board and any other person who may have to take action as a result of the report.
72. The local authority, or another body appointed by the local authority, must prepare an action plan in response to the recommendations of the report .

How do children's centres complain about their inspection or inspection report?

73. Any concerns the centre has about an inspection should be raised with the lead inspector while the inspection is being carried out and, where possible, resolved. Concerns may also be raised with a quality assurance inspector should one have been allocated to the inspection. If the concerns are not resolved by these means, or the person expressing the concern does not feel that due weight is being given to the concerns, or an independent view is sought, then the person raising the concern, or someone acting on his or her behalf, should contact the Ofsted helpline on 0300 123 1231.
74. Similarly, if the centre has any concerns about the inspection report these should be raised with the Ofsted helpline number as above.
75. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns raised then individuals or centres may decide to lodge a formal complaint. The complaints procedures are available on our website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A. Terminology

Advisory board: a group of persons who represent the interests of the children's centre users. The role of advisory board members is to provide advice, assistance and challenge to centre leaders, in order to ensure that the children's centre operates effectively and efficiently and fulfils its remit.

Childcare Act 2006: This is the law that sets out:

- duties on local authorities to improve outcomes for children and to ensure access to information about childcare provision in their area
- the legal provisions for the regulation and inspection of provision for children from birth to age 17
- the Early Years Foundation Stage: this is the framework for the delivery of quality integrated care and education for children from birth to the 31 August following their fifth birthday.

Children's centre inspection types: For the purposes of inspection, children's centres may be organised as:

- a children's centre group
- single centres.

A **children's centre group** has shared leadership and management **and** integrated services. Although it will consist of several centres, it is inspected as one children's centre and this will result in the publication of a single inspection report. The inspection looks at access to services and activities by families through the group; the services on offer by the group; and the impact they have. It does not make separate judgements about the individual centres that make up the group.

For the purposes of inspection, a **single centre** has one inspection and this will result in the publication of a single inspection report. A single centre:

- will normally have one main site although it may have other sites (often known as satellites) that are not centres in their own right and may open for only limited times and offer only limited services
- will offer some activities for children on at least one site
- may share particular services with other centres either through a formal or informal arrangement. We will normally refer to this as **collaborative working**.

In some cases a single centre may share management with other centres but does not offer integrated services with those centres (for example a local authority may have commissioned all phase two centres out to a third party organisation across the whole authority but each centre operates in its own right and does not share services).

Common Assessment Framework: a process whereby practitioners such as health visitors, social workers and children's centre outreach workers, can identify a child's or young person's needs early, assess those needs holistically, deliver coordinated services and review progress.

Early childhood services include: early years provision; the social services functions of the local authority in relation to young children, parents and prospective parents; health services relating to young children, parents or prospective parents; provision of assistance to parents and prospective parents for training and employment; and information and assistance for parents and prospective parents.

Early support programme: a programme for the families and carers of disabled children under five years of age. It allows families to co-ordinate the support they receive from health, education and social care professionals and organisations, and ensures they have more involvement in the care of their child and the organisation of future plans.

Early Years Foundation Stage: the statutory framework for the early education and care of children from birth to the 31 August following their fifth birthday. It includes requirements for the provision of young children's safeguarding and welfare, and their learning and development, which all providers must meet, as well as good practice guidance. The Early Years Foundation Stage must be delivered by all schools and early years settings that are registered on the Early Years Register.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP): this provides parents and carers, practitioners and teachers with a summary of a child's knowledge, understanding and abilities, and an assessment of their progress against the early learning goals. It must be completed for all children in their final term in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Early years provision: providers who are registered by Ofsted to care for children in the early years age group. These include:

- maintained and independent schools, including academies, directly responsible for provision for children from birth to the age of three or where no child attending the provision is a pupil of the school
- childcarers, such as childminders, day nurseries, pre-schools, wrap around provision and private nursery schools, which provide for children in the early years age group.

Employability programmes: Short learning programmes aiming to help unemployed learners into work. Terms used for unemployed people on benefits include: work-related activity group (WRAG), jobseekers allowance (JSA) and employment support allowance (ESA).

Families includes: parents and young children, and prospective parents and carers including wider family members.

Inspection Services Provider (ISP): Inspection services providers are external organisations contracted by Ofsted to provide Additional Inspectors, administrative support on inspection, the collation of pre-inspection information for inspectors via a portal, quality assurance and production of reports, and post-inspection evaluation by providers.

Inspections of childcare and/or early education: inspections of the Early Years Foundation Stage or requirements of the Childcare Register provided directly by a centre or by schools and settings working in partnership with the centre. It does not refer to all inspections of childcare and early years in the reach area of the centre.

Joint observations: an opportunity for senior centre staff to observe a particular activity session, course or other piece of work with an inspector, and discuss key findings from this.

Key contact: usually a senior member of the centre's staff who has been designated to provide the vital key link between the children's centre and the inspection team. The key contact is usually the centre leader and he/she is invited to attend team meetings. In addition this person undertakes other critical tasks throughout the inspection related to the organisation of inspection timetables and activities and the evidence base that inspectors require. Where there is an inspection of more than one centre operating as group or a simultaneous inspection of single centres, each centre may have a named contact who liaises with a named inspector.

Locality: a geographical area that is usually a smaller unit than the local authority as a whole (unless the local authority is a very small unitary authority). For the purposes of inspection, the locality is the area within the local authority that the inspection team covers. Where possible, inspections of centres in a locality will happen simultaneously allowing for the sharing of some evidence and inspector resource. Inspection in a locality may consist of:

- one or more children's centre groups
- merged or supercentres (where two or more centres have merged to have a large reach area)
- up to five single centres (this may be a collaborative arrangement)
- a reach area of around 3,000
- any combination of these depending on local authority arrangements.

Parents: include fathers, mothers, carers and other adults with responsibility for looking after a child, and prospective parents.

Reach area (may be abbreviated to 'area'): a designated geographical area within the local community which is the centre's catchment area.

School readiness: refers to how well prepared a child is to succeed when s/he starts school, and the extent to which s/he has acquired the skills, abilities and knowledge needed to make the most of the school curriculum.

Stakeholder: a person, group or organisation who has an interest or concern in the children's centre.

'Stand-alone': is used to describe the inspection of one single centre only, where circumstances mean that it is not possible to inspect is simultaneously alongside a number of other single centres in the same locality.

SureStart_On: The main source of information for scheduling is the SureStart_On database managed on behalf of the Department for Education.

Target groups: refer to the groups and families the centre identifies as having needs or circumstances that require particularly perceptive intervention and/or additional support. The following list is not exhaustive and does not imply that young children or families in any of these categories require additional support. The target groups will vary according to the centre's identification of its community and their needs but in any particular centre may include:

- lone parents, teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers
- children from low income backgrounds
- children living with domestic abuse, adult mental health issues and substance abuse
- children 'in need' or with a child protection plan
- children of offenders and/or those in custody
- fathers, particularly those with any other identified need, for example, teenage fathers and those in custody
- those with protected characteristics¹⁶, as defined by the Equality Act 2010
- children who are in the care of the local authority (looked after children)
- children who are being cared for by members of their extended family such as a grandparent, aunt or older sibling
- families identified by the local authority as 'troubled families' who have children under five
- families who move into and out of the area relatively quickly (transient families), such as asylum seekers, armed forces personnel and those who move into the area seeking employment or taking up seasonal work
- any other vulnerable groups or individual families including those young children and families identified as at risk of harm by other services – such as adult social care, schools, police, and health services.

Tracking: the actions and strategies that leaders and managers employ to monitor the effectiveness and impact of a centre's work. For example this may include using

¹⁶ Children and families with protected characteristics may include: those for whom English is an additional language; those from minority ethnic groups; those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families; those from lesbian, gay and transgender families.

local data/compiling centre data that identifies the number of families living in the local area, using the centre, attendance at activities and follow up monitoring of children and adults to determine whether there has been any longer term impact of their engagement with the centre.

Two-year-old progress check: a short written summary of a child's development in the three prime learning and development areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It must identify the child's strengths and any areas where the child may have developmental delay including the strategies and activities needed to address the concerns.

Universal services: services that are available to all families in an area who wish to use them.

Wider community: refers to all families in the reach area, including those who may not use the centre or benefit from its services.

Young children: refers to children aged under five years.