

Children's social care data in England

Quality and Methodology Report

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Introduction

This paper contains quality and methodology information relevant to Ofsted's annual release of children's social care data. This quality and methodology report should be read in conjunction with the background notes contained within the statistical first release (SFR), as those notes will include helpful information that is not in this report.

This release can be found at the following webpage:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/childrens-social-care-statistics.

The SFR contains data which is sourced from Ofsted's register of social care providers in England, and from inspections carried out by Ofsted. The release includes data about social care providers and places and inspection outcomes.

The inspection outcomes data relates to inspections of:

- local authority (LA) services for children who need help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The inspections of LA children's services are carried out under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) ¹
- children's homes
- other children's social care providers and residential accommodation for children.

The providers and places data includes:

- children's social care providers, for which Ofsted has a regulatory and/or inspection responsibility
- providers of residential accommodation for children, including boarding schools and further education colleges, for which Ofsted has an inspection responsibility.

In terms of the periods covered by the release, providers and places data always reflects the situation on 31 March. Inspection outcome data, for all non-LA provision types, can either be viewed for an annual period (from 1 April to 31 March) or, alternatively, as the latest inspection as at 31 March. For LA inspections the data in this release shows the picture as at 31 March 2017.

¹ More information about all inspection frameworks can be found in Annex 1 of this document.

This statistical release is published as a full version annually, with a supplemental release six months afterwards. The full version includes all provision types, as listed above, and contains final data. The supplemental release only includes data and tables relating to inspections of children’s homes and LA children’s services.

Ofsted publish, or published, a number of official statistics covering children’s social care, including fostering, adoption and children looked after placements. These releases can be accessed here: www.gov.uk/government/collections/childrens-social-care-statistics.

Ofsted welcomes feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the Social Care Data and Analysis Team on: socialcaredata@ofsted.gov.uk.

Relevance

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. Ofsted official statistics are released to promote reform and improvement across government through increasing transparency and citizen participation.

Ofsted regulates and inspects registered social care provisions under the Care Standards Act 2000.² Ofsted inspects LA children’s services, under section 136 (2) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.³ Ofsted conducts reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.⁴ More contextual information about social care in England, and Ofsted’s inspection activity, can be found in the SFR and the social care annual report.⁵

Please go to the gov.uk website for more information on how Ofsted regulates and/or inspects:

children’s social care providers – www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif⁶;

or LA children’s services – www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/inspections.

Social care inspection outcomes is important information for policy development, as well as for planning and providing public services, for example by informing about the quality of social care provisions nationally and by area. There is a demand for inspection outcomes information, for example to help Ofsted meet its obligations under inspection legislation and to influence policy. The data contributes to meetings with organisations such as the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS)

² The Care Standards Act 2000: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents

³ Education and Inspections Act 2006: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents

⁴ Children Act 2004: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents

⁵ www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/inspections

⁶ This link covers the Social Care Common Inspection Framework, in use from April 2017. Details of the changes from the framework used in 2016-17 are available in the consultation document here: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-social-care-inspection

and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), informing policy discussions and decisions. Inspection reports can be found on the Ofsted website (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted) and statistics about the outcomes of inspections can be found on the gov.uk website (www.gov.uk/government/collections/childrens-social-care-statistics).

A further use of the data is that Ofsted uses it to enhance insight into this sector, including contributing to the reviews of inspection frameworks, evidence and reports.

The data is published annually as official statistics, with a supplementary publication six months later. The aggregation of data for official statistics allows Ofsted to communicate to users the key data and messages about children's social care, for example, at different geographical levels and within sub-types of provider. The official statistics draw out the key messages and communicate these in an understandable way, appropriate for a wide range of different users. Users are able to interpret and manipulate the data published for their own purposes, as the release includes underlying data and interactive summary tables.

The data may, therefore, be used by stakeholder groups, academics and other interested parties across the sector. LAs may also use the data themselves, for local and regional use, to inform on areas of practice and to improve processes and standards.

Some of the data about children's social care in England is unique to Ofsted; alternative sources are not available. For instance, data about the new and resigning services in England and their capacity, as well as inspection outcomes, is only collected by Ofsted. This data is widely viewed as a valuable source of information about services available in England, and for providing an in depth overall picture of the quality of provision in England.

Meeting user needs

In late 2014, the release was reviewed and amended by Ofsted's Social Care Data and Analysis Team, who produce the social care official statistics. A consultation was conducted to seek views on the proposed arrangements for the frequency and content of social care inspection official statistics. A report from this consultation can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/statistics-on-social-care-providers-and-places-and-inspection-outcomes.

Ofsted's Social Care Data and Analysis Team is represented at regional meetings of performance leads from LAs. These regional meetings are organised by the ADCS. Ofsted has presented relevant information and publications to all of the existing regional groups, and sought feedback about whether its publications meet user needs. Ofsted's participation in these groups helps inform about user views on Ofsted's social care official statistics, and suggested improvements are taken on board. For instance, in addition to the consultation response regarding production of

annual data, feedback from providers and stakeholders indicated that a full set of inspection outcomes as at 31 March would be preferred and more comprehensive. Therefore, in addition to the annual statistics, the release was amended for the 2015 data to include an option to view the latest inspection judgement as at the 31 March (i.e. this includes all active providers; not just those inspected during the year).

Social care outputs are also shared with users in other organisations, such as the DfE, LAs and representatives from the private and voluntary sectors at Ofsted-led stakeholder meetings. These organisations use the data for a range of purposes, including informing their own social care outputs (DfE) and benchmarking performance (LAs).

The contact details for the Social Care Data and Analysis team are included in the releases and users are encouraged to feedback about any unmet needs or improvements that can be made.

There was an Ofsted-wide user consultation survey in January 2012 on all Ofsted official statistics releases. A report from this consultation can be found here: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/report-responses-2012-consultation-of-ofsted-official-statistics> (now archived).

More information about Ofsted's Engagement policy and Confidentiality and Access policy, as well as Ofsted's Statement of Administrative Sources, can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics. Ofsted also operates under more detailed internal engagement guidance.

Coherence and comparability

Comparisons of inspection outcomes across different inspection frameworks are not always possible due to the changes to the evaluation criteria and scope of inspection. More information about inspection frameworks can be found in Annex 1 of this quality report. The release itself makes a clear distinction for framework changes, such that it is clear to users where inspections are not directly comparable. For instance, for LA children's services, the statistical tables display inspection outcomes according to the specific inspection framework. Where frameworks are not comparable, it is not possible to view data relating to more than one inspection framework at a time.

Comparisons of inspection outcomes across different timescales within a particular inspection cycle are not always possible due to the way inspections are risk assessed and selected for inspection. Ofsted takes a proportionate approach to inspection. Some providers are selected for inspection because they are approaching the deadline for re-inspection and others as a result of their previous inspection outcomes. Where this occurs, however, information is given in the release. The revision of the release to present annual, rather than quarterly, statistics allows

users to more easily compare inspection outcomes across timescales for some provider types, such as children’s homes which are all inspected annually.

Within the key findings, where statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have improved or declined, this analysis is based on comparable inspections only and uses the most recent relevant inspection outcome.

Inspections of social care provisions in other countries in the UK are carried out by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), the Care Inspectorate in Scotland, and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority in Northern Ireland.⁷ Ofsted is the only inspectorate in the UK that publishes detailed statistics about the quality of social care providers that it regulates and inspects. Although some UK regions publish some figures on numbers of providers and places or the number of inspections carried out, these are generally not detailed enough to provide for useful comparison. Comparable data for other countries, including via the EuroStat database, is not available.

Data is considered both in year (1 April to 31 March) and as at a fixed date (31 March); again, comparisons are made between years where appropriate. Data is also considered and compared between provider types, regions, sectors (private/LA/voluntary), and, where appropriate, LAs.

Accuracy and reliability

The data used for this SFR is data that belongs to Ofsted, as administrative data extracted directly from Ofsted’s internal database system, Cygnum.

The data is subject to a rigorous quality assurance (QA) process by Ofsted, both as part of Ofsted’s internal processes for ensuring data quality in the regulatory records system, and as part of the production of this SFR.

The inspection outcome data within the release does not use any imputation or other statistical techniques and data is not used to make any estimates about the population or other geographical areas. As the data is solely reporting on events that have occurred, the risk of bias or error is reduced.

The data on places comes from two sources: conditions of registration and, where these are not part of the registration such as with schools, from an annual census Ofsted carries out that asks residential providers for the maximum number of residential students they could accommodate. Registration conditions form part of the inspection and so are subject to the same rigorous QA processes as inspection reports.

⁷ More information about inspections in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is available from CSSIW (www.cssiw.org.uk), the Care Inspectorate (www.careinspectorate.com) and Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (www.rqia.org.uk).

The providers and places data within the release does include estimates, where places data is not held in Ofsted's system.⁸ These are based on the average number of places for providers of the same type, within the same sector. Providers without places data are excluded from the calculation of average places; consequently the reliability of the average is improved by avoiding under- or over-estimation. If there are fewer than 10 providers with valid places data (not null or zero) within a particular sector, the average is calculated from the national group of providers with valid places data. Ofsted does hold places data for the vast majority (99%) of providers and, therefore, the risk of error through estimation is negligible. In total, there are approximately none providers for which places data has been estimated; this is a drop from around 30 in previous years, and suggests that the data quality has improved.

Ofsted is able to extract all data to ensure that any data entered incorrectly at the operational stage is accounted for and duplicates or incorrect records removed from the data set. This limits the risk of error in the data. Furthermore, data about inspection judgements is made available to the public. All providers are sent copies of their inspection report for a factual accuracy check prior to publication. Inspection judgements held in the data systems will, therefore, always be verified by inspectors, and providers are also given the opportunity during the QA phase of the report to check and comment on the inspection judgements. Individual inspection reports are published and this offers a high level of transparency and assurance - if errors were being brought in at the operational level, there is a clear right of reply for stakeholders. Checks of the statistical data against both the system data source and published inspection reports provide an additional level of assurance.

An example of the system wide data checks is the rigorous checking of one particular area of data, which has turned inaccurate and partially completed data into complete and very valuable data. Sectorial data, several years ago, was input at source, at best, haphazardly, and often wrong. Ofsted statisticians have transformed that into accurate data, by working with the administrative teams on the definition of the various sectors and also on the guidelines for completing the data filed in our database. The Social Care Data and Analysis team also carried out a national data cleanse of this data which involved contacting every provider and asking them to confirm the sector they were part of. The data now enables Ofsted to report on sector both internally and to the wider users of its data. This is important as there is a growing public interest in sectorial data and how the ownership pattern of social care provisions may or may not be changing over time, and also the level of service provided by the differing sectors.

The dataset is securely stored in Excel format accessible only to Ofsted colleagues working on the release. Some initial aggregation of data is done using an SQL database, but analysis is done entirely in Excel.

⁸ More information about database systems can be found in Ofsted's Statement for administrative sources: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics

More than one analyst is involved in the production and analysis of the data and QA is always conducted by a different team member to the person who produced the work. The QA checks required are carried out at various stages of the production process, covering everything from: the SQL code used to export data, all processing and calculations, the release template, and analysis and contents of the key findings, along with any supplementary statistics that are published. All outputs are reviewed and subject to a sign off process to ensure suitability for publication. Where applicable, provider and places data is considered against the DfE data on the children's social care sector in England.

Strengths of the data are:

1. The data belongs to Ofsted: this allows for certainty around the QA carried out on all data.
2. Robust QA of the data by Ofsted: Ofsted completes detailed QA of all tables, underlying data, and reports created from this data.
3. Data benchmarking: where applicable, data is benchmarked against data submitted to the DfE, and generally found to be in line with DfE data.
4. Comprehensive snapshot of the children's social care sector: due to the known quality of the data, as well as the inclusion of DfE data, the data provides a comprehensive picture of children's social care in England over the last three years.
5. All required data present: due to the data being Ofsted's internal data, there is almost no missing data.
6. No risk of bias: as discussed above, this SFR reports on events which have happened, and so there is no risk of bias.

Limitations of the data are:

1. Limited comparable data: much of the data held is only held by Ofsted, and therefore cannot be verified against other sources.
2. Incorrect reporting by providers: in a small number of cases, data supplied by providers does not appear to be accurate (for example, an incorrect postcode). This has minimal impact on this particular SFR, however, and is usually identified during QA.
3. Errors or corrections in recording: although these are again minimal, there are occasions when data is recorded incorrectly, or needs to be amended (for example, a setting is recorded as being Private instead of Voluntary provision), which can impact on comparability between years. These are usually identified during the QA stage and accounted for.

4. Some use of estimation: as described above, in some cases, the number of places for a provider is estimated as this has not been supplied. The paragraphs above describe how the impact of this is mitigated.

Timeliness and punctuality

These full statistics covering all Ofsted social care inspections are produced and published on an annual basis. An additional release, which relates only to LA children's services and children's homes, is published six months after the full release. Where possible, supplementary data are also published to improve the accessibility to, and usefulness of, the data. This includes the publication of management information.

Data is published on the date pre-announced in the publication schedule here: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/statistics. Information on any delay in publication can also be found on the publication schedule. Reasons why a delay may occur include, for example, where more time is necessary to properly quality assure the data to ensure its robustness. Publications are announced on Ofsted's Twitter page and social media channels on the day of release.

The average timescale for production of the children's social care data release is approximately twelve weeks. This time includes obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and getting the information on to the Ofsted website.

Pre-release is given in accordance with the pre-release access to Official Statistics Order (2008), as detailed in Ofsted's pre-release policy here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics.

Accessibility and clarity

Ofsted releases are published in an accessible format on the gov.uk website. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data.

Data covering children's social care is held on a collections page on gov.uk: www.gov.uk/government/collections/childrens-social-care-statistics.

The primary function of the data is to meet Ofsted's data requirements for inspections. However, the data is shared for public use with the intention of informing about children's social care in England and for re-use by analysts and researchers as may be required.

Ofsted also publishes data for all remits, including social care, as part of the annual Data View, available here: <https://public.tableau.com/profile/ofsted#!/vizhome/Dataview/Viewregionalperformancevertime>

Performance, cost and respondent burden

As data is administrative, there is no associated cost or respondent burden.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

Where sensitive or personal data is held by Ofsted, the disclosure control processes we have in place ensure that this data is not published. All data releases follow Ofsted's confidentiality and revisions policies which can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics. All staff using sensitive data have been trained in confidentiality and disclosure awareness.

Some data fields are redacted from the underlying data, for data protection purposes. Data affected by redactions includes fields related to provider names and addresses. All inspection judgements are provided in full without redaction. All inspection data presented in statistical tables is actual figures; the data is not subject to rounding or suppression.

Methodology

Data processing involves aggregating numbers of inspections, listed by inspection type, provision type, region and inspection outcome. This processing is done using SQL and is reviewed and revised regularly; this is also quality assured before the data is used for analysis.

Inspection data is summarised in two formats: inspections carried out in a defined period, and latest inspection as at a particular point in time. Both types of inspection data only include inspections which have been published (at the time specified in the SFR).

The defined period of inspection data is dependent on the type of provision:

- Data about inspections of LA children's services includes inspections that were conducted under the current framework, and therefore does not reflect an annual period. The period covered is detailed in the release.
- Data about inspections of all children's social care providers includes inspections that were carried out during the annual period of 1 April to 31 March.

The latest inspection data covers all social care providers, irrespective of when the inspections were carried out. Only one inspection per provider is counted. The data reflects the latest inspection for each provider (i.e. most recent published event, at the time of producing the data). This means that the data will include some inspections that were carried out under previous inspection frameworks; further explanatory notes are given in the release.

No data has been removed prior to analysis.

Definitions are provided in the SFR; for instance the glossary includes a list of the provision types and describes what each provision type offers.

The main points in the key findings document were chosen to focus on key areas of the SFR, in order to provide immediate and relevant findings to users of the document. In particular, they were selected based on comparison to previous years in the data – either where a trend had continued over time, or where there was a notable change from previous years. Main points also focused on areas of particular interest to the sector, and to “myth bust” some common perceptions about the sector and inspection outcomes.

Annex 1

The following table provides links to the relevant inspection frameworks for social care providers in England.⁹

Provision type	Link to Ofsted framework
Adoption support agencies	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-adoption-support-agencies
Boarding Schools	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-boarding-and-residential-provision-in-schools
Children’s homes	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-childrens-homes
FE colleges with residential accommodation	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspection-of-residential-provision-in-further-education-colleges
Independent fostering services (IFAs)	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-independent-fostering-agencies
LA children’s services	Single Inspection Framework (SIF) and guidance: www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-local-authority-childrens-services
Residential family centres	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-residential-family-centres
Residential Holiday Schemes for Disabled Children	https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-residential-holiday-schemes-for-disabled-children
Residential special schools	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-residential-special-schools
Secure training centres	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-secure-training-centres
Voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs)	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-voluntary-adoption-agencies

⁹ Many of these links now refer to the Social Care Common Inspection Framework, in use from April 2017 onwards.