

Ofsted announces changes to inspections of local authorities' children's services

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Ofsted has today published updates to the framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS).

- Changes to the ILACS framework to take effect from April 2026, including removal of headline judgement.
- Updates align inspections with children's social care reforms and revised statutory guidance and tackle the use of unregistered children's homes.
- Ofsted to consult on renewed inspection framework for social care inspections in summer 2026.

The changes ensure inspections will better reflect how local authorities are delivering for children in care and their families, in line with recent social care reforms and changes to statutory guidance, including 'Working together to safeguard children' and the 'Children's social care national framework'. The updates will come into effect on inspections carried out from 1 April 2026.

The updated inspection framework places greater emphasis on family networks and purposeful multi-agency working, recognising that keeping children safely with their families where possible and high ambitions for children in care and care leavers are central goals of the reforms. In addition, the framework reflects the importance of professional development for senior leaders and collaboration between social workers and practitioners with different qualifications or areas of expertise.

The updates also put more focus on ending the use of unregistered children's homes. Many children continue to be placed in homes that are not registered with or inspected by Ofsted, putting them at risk of harm. Under the updated framework, inspectors will challenge local authorities on their use of unlawful unregistered homes and how they plan to stop using them.

Removal of headline judgement

In November 2025, Ofsted confirmed the removal of the headline judgement in ILACS from April 2026 following feedback to the Big Listen consultation. The updated framework will continue to make 3 practice judgements - about help and protection, children in care, and care leavers - alongside a judgement on the impact of leaders.

With the removal of the headline judgement, Ofsted has set out how and when local children's services will be inspected:

- Local authorities judged good or outstanding for the impact of leaders and at least 2 practice judgements will usually receive one focused visit before a short inspection.
- Local authorities judged requires improvement to be good for the impact of leaders or at least 2 of their practice judgments will usually receive 2 focused visits and then a standard inspection.
- Local authorities judged inadequate for any practice judgement will receive monitoring visits and then a standard inspection.

Ofsted will also continue to consider local authorities' self-evaluations, data and intelligence before deciding when and how to inspect.

Further consultation

Last year, Ofsted announced plans to reform more broadly how local children's social care services are inspected.

A consultation with children, professionals and local leaders will open this summer on proposals to develop a renewed children and families services inspection framework. Further details will then be refined, in consultation with the sector, for introduction in 2027.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver said:

Children's experiences and progress are at the heart of all our work, and we've worked closely with the sector, experts and government to shape these important updates to our ILACS framework.

The changes will ensure our inspections reflect the focus of ongoing reforms across children's social care, including a stronger emphasis on family help, multi-agency working, and supporting children to remain safely with their families.

They will also strengthen ILACS for 2026 and provide a solid foundation for the development of our renewed children and families services inspection framework, which we'll soon be consulting on for implementation in 2027.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-announces-changes-to-inspections-of-local-authorities-childrens-services>