

# Inspection handbook: Inspections of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass)

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This guidance is to assist inspectors when they conduct inspections of Cafcass.

It should be read alongside the *Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspection of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass)*.

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## Introduction

1. This guidance is to assist inspectors when they conduct inspections of the Children and Families Court Advice and Support Service (Cafcass). It should be read alongside the *Framework for the inspection of the Children and Families Court Advice and Support Service (Cafcass)*.
2. Cafcass can use this guidance to understand how inspections will be conducted. They may also find it useful when carrying out their self-evaluation. Ofsted publishes all its guidance for inspectors.
3. Inspections are carried out according to the published inspection framework. This guidance document sets out the principles of inspection and the code of conduct, which all inspectors know and apply.
4. This guidance is not a set of inflexible rules, but is guidance on the procedures that normally govern inspection.

## Inspection of Cafcass

### Scheduling and team deployment

5. Cafcass will be notified of the inspection on the day the lead inspector arrives on site. Normally, 10 suitably qualified and experienced HMI will carry out the inspection. The full inspection team will normally be on site in the local Cafcass service areas for 10 working days across a five-week period, but never more than three days in any area.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Lead inspector goes on-site on Friday	Lead inspector on-site at national office; two inspectors on-site in the Cafcass National Business Centre on Monday. <b>Remainder of the inspection team off-site</b>	Full inspection team on site in three service areas Tuesday to Thursday	Full inspection team on site in three service areas Tuesday to Thursday	Full inspection team on site in usually two service areas Tuesday and Wednesday. On-site at national office on Friday

6. Inspections will not normally take place during August or over the Christmas and New Year period.

### Deferrals

7. As inspectors arrive on site on day one of the inspection, they are likely to encounter a variety of complex situations. However, inspections will not

normally be deferred. Illness or non-availability of an inspector must be reported immediately to the Ofsted manager with lead responsibility. This will not usually result in rescheduling of the inspection, as a replacement inspector will be sought.

8. Inspections will only be deferred in exceptional circumstances. Staff absence, including the absence of the Cafcass Chief Executive (CE) or National Service Director (NSD) is not a reason for deferral. Deferrals will only be made where there is a strong case that, if the inspection went ahead, it might place staff at risk, or if inspectors are severely restricted in their ability to gather secure evidence. Such conditions might be:
  - serious weather conditions that make access to sites for inspectors and staff difficult and/or dangerous
  - a power failure meaning that inspectors cannot access electronic records for a prolonged period.

### **Inspection activity and gathering evidence**

9. Most inspection evidence will be gathered by looking at individual children and young people's experiences.
10. Inspections will focus on direct practice by:
  - on-site scrutinising and discussing the sample of children's cases that reflect the scope of the inspection alongside practitioners working with the child or young person – this should include Cafcass practitioners and other professionals involved in the case. These discussions do not have to be in person and may be by telephone
  - meeting with children, young people, parents and carers
  - shadowing staff in their day-to-day work, for example observing work in court and the work of family court advisers directly with children and families
  - observing practice in multi-agency/single agency meetings.
11. Inspectors will review a sample of supervision records related to the sample of children and young people.

### **The roles of the lead inspector, deputy lead inspector and team inspector**

12. The lead inspector will:
  - coordinate the inspection between the team and with the Cafcass national leadership team
  - oversee the quality assurance and consistency of the work of the inspection team

- ensure that all areas of the evaluation schedule are inspected
  - develop lines of enquiry alongside the team
  - ensure that evidence is sufficiently robust to support judgements
  - provide support and advice to the team
  - consider any health and safety risks for individual inspectors.
13. During the inspection, if further external support and advice is needed this will usually be through the Ofsted quality assurance Senior HMI assigned to the inspection.
14. The deputy lead inspectors will:
- work with the lead inspector to ensure a consistent and high quality inspection
  - lead the local service area inspections and liaise with local leaders
  - ensure that inspectors are clear which children and young people they will be tracking and/or where within the scope of the inspection they will focus their attention
  - provide leadership capacity to the team both in the relationship with Cafcass and the management and quality assurance of the inspection
  - provide an important 'check and balance', offering support and challenge to the lead inspector
  - support the lead inspector in assuring the quality of the final inspection report
  - contribute to the lead inspector's quality assurance of their own and other inspectors' work during inspections.
15. The team inspector will:
- act flexibly in undertaking tasks and activities within the inspection team
  - work across judgement areas to provide challenge and scrutiny to each other's work
  - take individual responsibility for the quality of the inspection and inspection report
  - undertake quality assurance of their own and other inspectors' work during inspections.

## **Structure and overview of the inspection**

16. The timeframe for inspection, including preparation, on-site work and the publication of the inspection report, is set out below.

Example day of week	Working day	Activity	
<b>Week one</b> Monday-Thurs day	0	Preparation (off site).	Lead inspector
<b>Week one</b> Friday	1	<p>Lead inspector notifies the Chief Executive or in their absence the National Service Director of the inspection by 9.30 am and asks Cafcass to begin to prepare the information outlined in Annex A. Lead inspector goes on-site by 11.30 am to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ meet with the Chief Executive/National Service Director and other senior leaders to outline how the inspection will run</li> <li>■ start to identify the cases of children and young people for inspectors to evaluate during week two (off-site) and further gather information as outlined in Annex A of this document and begin to plan the remainder of the inspection</li> <li>■ share initial lines of enquiry.</li> </ul> <p>Cafcass makes available the first tranche of child-level data across the data fields in Annex A.</p>	Lead inspector
<b>Week two</b> Monday	2	<p>Lead inspector on-site at national office by 9.30 am and a team of two at the national business centre arrive on-site by 10.30 am for maximum of two days. Lead inspector notifies Cafcass of the service areas to be visited in week three.</p> <p>Cafcass provide the remainder of the Annex A request.</p> <p>The rest of the inspection team are involved in preparation off-site.</p>	Lead inspector and initial inspection team (on site)
<b>Week two</b> Tuesday-Thurs day	3-5	<p>Lead inspector remains on-site, as necessary, to continue to gather evidence relating to central functions.</p> <p>Team inspectors evaluate sample of recently filed safeguarding letters and recently closed reports and files from across the national organisation.</p>	<p>Lead inspector (on-site)</p> <p>Team inspectors (off-site)</p>

Example day of week	Working day	Activity	
<b>Week two</b> Friday	6	Lead inspector and full inspection team meet to identify lines of enquiry.	Lead inspector and initial inspection team (off-site)
<b>Week three</b> Monday Tuesday to Thursday	7 8–10	Team preparation and travel. Lead inspector remains on-site at national office. Lead inspector notifies Cafcass of the three service areas to be visited in week four.  Three teams of three HMI, each led by a deputy lead inspector go on-site in three Cafcass service areas.	Full team on-site – Lead at national office or with full team in local offices
<b>Week three</b> Friday	11	Lead inspector and full inspection team meet to agree the findings of inspection in each of the three service areas and further lines of enquiry arising from week three.	Lead inspector and full inspection team (off-site)
<b>Week four</b> Monday Tuesday to Thursday	12 13-15	Team preparation and travel. Lead inspector remains on-site at national office as required.  Three teams of three HMI, each led by a deputy lead inspector go on-site in three Cafcass service areas.	Full team onsite – Lead at national office or with full team in local offices
<b>Week four</b> Friday	16	Lead inspector and full inspection team meet to agree the findings of inspection in each of the three service areas and further lines of enquiry arising from week four.	Lead inspector and full inspection team (off-site)
<b>Week five</b> Monday Tuesday and Wednesday	17 18-19	Team preparation and travel. Lead inspector remains on-site at national office as required.  Full team go on-site in one or two Cafcass service areas.	Full team on-site – Lead at national office or with full team in local offices
<b>Week five</b> Thursday	20	Lead inspector and full inspection team meet to agree the findings of inspection in each of the service areas and arrive at provisional overall judgements.	Full inspection team

<b>Example day of week</b>	<b>Working day</b>	<b>Activity</b>	
<b>Week five</b> Friday	21	Inspection leadership team (Lead inspector and three deputy lead inspectors) meet with Cafcass senior leadership team at Cafcass national office for the 'next steps' meeting.  Formal feedback to Cafcass Board members, senior leadership team and stakeholders as agreed by Cafcass.	Inspection leadership team  Inspection leadership team
<b>Week six and week seven</b>	22–30	Report drafting and quality assurance process. A draft report is agreed between the quality assurance (QA) manager, the lead inspector and the National Director, Social Care or deputy.	Identified inspectors coordinated by the lead inspector
<b>Week seven</b> Friday	31	A draft report is sent to the Chief Executive/National Service Director within 10 working days of the end of fieldwork for a factual accuracy check. They have five working days to respond.	Lead inspector
<b>Week eight</b> Monday – Thursday	32–35	Factual accuracy check by Cafcass.	
Friday	36	Comments received from Cafcass.	Lead inspector
<b>Week nine</b>	37–40	Consideration of the comments on factual accuracy, amendments and final stages of QA. Lead inspector and QA manager to agree final report by day 35 before pre-publication version sent to Chief Executive/National Service Director, Department for Education/Ministry of Justice.	Lead inspector and QA manager
Friday	41	Report published.	

## Pre-inspection activity

- Pre-inspection analysis and planning are an important part of all inspections. The Ofsted senior analytical officer will coordinate the data and provide a pre-inspection briefing for the lead inspector that will be shared with the inspection team. The Ofsted senior analytical officer will ensure that the briefing contains

all the information the lead inspector and team will need to inform the inspection planning and on-site activity. This will summarise:

- relevant nationally published data
  - information and analysis of the internal management information provided to Ofsted routinely
  - analysed returns from the annual surveys of children, young people, birth relatives, Cafcass staff and Cafcass key stakeholders
  - the findings from Cafcass Individual Management Reviews and any subsequent published serious case reviews. These will be from across the national organisation in a timescale of six – 12 months
  - evidence from whistle-blowing to Ofsted
  - Ombudsman reports regarding Cafcass. These will be from across the national organisation in a timescale of six – 12 months
  - any other related published documentation, such as the Cafcass annual report.
18. Ofsted will access Cafcass’s updated list of relevant offices and this information will be used to inform the pre-inspection briefing. Lead inspectors will use this information to decide which Cafcass service areas and specific offices to visit at the beginning of the inspection.
  19. The lead inspector will have four days allocated, before fieldwork begins, to review documents and to ensure that the fieldwork is properly focused and used to best effect in collecting first-hand evidence.
  20. The lead inspector will assimilate the pre-inspection briefing and identify initial lines of enquiry for the inspection. Only initial lines of enquiry will be generated at this point. These will be shared with Cafcass at the beginning of the inspection, in week one.
  21. The lead inspector will further develop the briefing. The briefing should be a sharp and concise document indicating the main issues for the inspection. It must be completed against the main headings of the evaluation schedule.
  22. The final document will be emailed to the inspection team prior to their planning day and is a critical part of their preparation before their on-site inspection activity.
  23. All inspectors have a minimum of one day to prepare for the inspection. All inspectors must have read the briefing and familiarised themselves with the relevant material and profile of each Cafcass service area before arriving on-site. In addition, the lead inspector is likely to email other documents to inspectors prior to the on-site activity.

24. The Annex A material provided by Cafcass must be read. The lead inspector will allocate material across the team. Key points will be disseminated to inform the inspection.

## **Week one: starting the inspection**

### **Day 1: notifying Cafcass and requesting information**

25. The lead inspector will ensure that Cafcass (usually the Chief Executive (CE) or the National Service Director (NSD)) is notified by telephone of the inspection by 9.30am on the day the fieldwork is scheduled to begin and go on-site by 11.30am.
26. Immediately following the telephone call to Cafcass the lead inspector will email the CE/NSD to confirm the start of the inspection and data requirements (see Annex A and Annex B). If the CE or NSD are not available, the lead inspector will speak with/email the most senior manager available and ask them to notify the CE or, if the CE is not available, the NSD. The non-availability of the CE or a senior manager will not delay the start of the inspection.
27. The lead inspector will ask Cafcass to provide, from their internal electronic records, the information required to identify the recently closed cases of children and young people. During the first full week of the inspection, these children and young people will have their experiences evaluated. Cafcass should use unique identification numbers rather than full names. Ideally this will be on an Excel spreadsheet.
28. Cafcass will be asked to provide this information by 2pm of the first day on-site.
29. Annex A lists all the supplementary information that we request from Cafcass to inform the inspection. The lead inspector will receive this information as soon as is practicable.
30. It is expected that Cafcass will maintain this information to inform their oversight and management of the service. On this basis, Ofsted does not consider that the request for supporting information is unreasonable.
31. When scheduling which Cafcass service areas to include in the fieldwork, we will take account of: previous inspection outcomes; information from other sources such as whistleblowing, complaints and serious case reviews; and any other relevant information. During the inspection, inspectors will visit up to eight Cafcass service areas: three in week three, three in week four and either one or two in week five. Each service area will be notified one week prior to the visit. The sample of service areas will be a balanced sample and will take account of:
  - areas with high performance data
  - areas with weaker performance data

- the volume of work
  - the time since an area has been inspected
  - information that comes to light during the inspection.
32. Inspectors will not necessarily visit every office in each service area, but will look at a sample of work that is representative of the service area.
33. Cafcass will also be asked for a list of opportunities for inspectors to directly observe practice during week three, which is the first week of on-site activity in three Cafcass service areas. Practice observations will primarily focus on court work and office appointments. Ideally, this will be on another Excel spreadsheet. This information should be provided to the lead inspector by email by the end of Friday of week two. The same expectation will be made regarding practice observations.
34. At the beginning of the inspection, the lead inspector will ask to meet with the CE and/or NSD for an initial meeting on arrival.
35. The lead inspector will:
- provide an opportunity for Cafcass representatives to explain the organisation's national and local context, key strengths and challenges
  - provide further information about the scope of the inspection
  - outline the format and methodology of the inspection – practice observations and scrutiny of case files with appropriate workers – clarifying the fact that evidence-gathering will be focused on children and young people's experiences and the quality of advice given to the family court
  - ensure that the CE/NSD is aware of the data and information requirements in Annex A and agree when and how these will be shared
  - discuss arrangements to meet regularly with the CE/NSD and the senior leadership team, to discuss the scope and timing of the meetings, the final next steps meeting and feedback
  - agree practical arrangements as needed, such as work space and arrangements for access to files and information technology systems, including staff support to access the systems
  - identify a link support person for the inspection and arrangements for interviewing staff
  - advise Cafcass of the contact details of the lead inspector, deputy lead inspectors, inspection team members and the allocated Ofsted Senior HMI responsible for quality assurance
  - provide information for affected/relevant staff such as copies of the summary of the framework that explains the purpose of the inspection (see Annex C).

36. The lead inspector will select 150 recently closed cases from across the national organisation (in the past two weeks) for inspectors to review the files. These will be made up of:
- 50 safeguarding letters that did not progress to Cafcass involvement post first hearing
  - 50 private law cases that did progress to Cafcass involvement post first hearing and a report to court (10 of which will be rule 16.4 cases)
  - 50 public law cases (five of which will be s25 applications to place a young person in a secure setting).
37. Of these 150 cases, the lead inspector will identify 60 cases that Cafcass will be asked to audit by the end of Wednesday in week two. The cases to be audited will be:
- 20 safeguarding letters that did not progress to Cafcass involvement post first hearing
  - 20 private law cases
  - 20 public law cases.

### **Week two: Lead inspector on-site/case evaluation off-site**

38. The lead inspector will be on-site at national office for four days (Monday–Thursday) and two HMI will arrive on-site in National Business Centre (NBC) no earlier than 10.30 am. The inspectors in the NBC will evaluate the effectiveness of the NBC tasks such as complaints handling and the administration of private law applications and safeguarding checks. This will include evaluating the last 10 completed complaints investigations.
39. All inspectors will confirm their identities by producing their inspector identity badges. It is not necessary for inspectors to carry copies of Criminal Records Bureau/Disclosure and Barring Service checks.
40. During week two Cafcass will be asked to audit the experiences of a cohort of children and young people identified by the lead inspector in week one.
41. Cafcass will be asked to consider the strengths of the practice they audit and where they identify areas for improvement in individual cases and as themes across the cohort of cases. It is anticipated that Cafcass will use the inspection evaluation schedule as a benchmark of good practice.
42. Cafcass will ensure that the lead inspector receives the outcome of the audits by the end of Wednesday of week two.
43. During week two (and possibly weeks three and four), in addition to the CE and NSD, the lead inspector will meet with:

- representatives of the Cafcass National Improvement Service
- representatives of the Cafcass Management Information Service
- Assistant Directors with portfolios
- the Chair of the Cafcass Board and/or other Board members
- representatives of the Cafcass Legal Service
- The Cafcass/Family Justice Children and Young People's Board.

44. The lead inspector will also make contact with:

- The Department for Education
- The Ministry of Justice
- HM Court and Tribunal Service
- The senior family judiciary
- The Association of Directors of Children's Services
- And any other stakeholders identified during the inspection.

45. The remaining off-site inspectors will evaluate the sample identified by the lead inspector on day one of the inspection of recently filed and closed safeguarding letters, and recently closed reports and files.

46. On Friday of week two, the lead inspector and full inspection team meet, off-site, to identify lines of enquiry.

### **Team meeting prior to local area inspection activity**

47. The full inspection team will meet off-site at on the Friday of week two. The purpose of this meeting is to:

- provide information about the key issues arising from the case file reading and preparatory work, including any lines of enquiry
- share knowledge of the local areas and local priorities
- allocate tasks and responsibilities, ensuring that team members are supported and able to provide challenge to each other
- agree practicalities and arrangements for team meetings and keeping in touch with the CE/NSD/heads of service
- consider any health and safety risks for individual inspectors (inspectors should use the generic hazard assessment form)
- ensure that inspectors are clear which children and young people they will be tracking and/or where within the scope of the inspection they will focus their attention.

## **Weeks three, four and five: local service area inspection**

48. The lead inspector will confirm the service areas to be visited one week ahead of that visit. At this point, consent for inspectors to observe practice in local courts must be sought by Cafcass.
49. Planning for these weeks will take place in the week preceding the on-site visit. Cafcass will be asked to provide a list of all recently filed cases (past two weeks), eliminating any that have been already sampled in week two and a further list of activities where inspectors may wish to observe practice, including court duty days. These lists will be passed to the lead inspector by 12:00 pm Friday prior to the onsite week. The lead inspector will identify 10 cases and practice observations.
50. The lead inspector will be based at the Cafcass national office during this period. However, she/he may be off-site some days and may go on-site with the remainder of the inspection team elsewhere.
51. At the beginning of each fieldwork week, the deputy lead inspector leading the service area team will meet with the local head of service to:
  - confirm which recently filed cases will be evaluated by inspectors and which opportunities to observe practice will be used
  - identify staff supervision record related to five of the cases
  - identify five cases to be audited by the local management team (three private and two public recently close cases)
  - provide an opportunity for the head of service to explain the organisation's local context, key strengths and challenges
  - provide further information about the scope of the inspection
  - outline the format and methodology of the inspection – practice observations and scrutiny of case files with appropriate workers – clarifying the fact that evidence gathering will be focused on children and young people's experiences and the quality of advice given to the family court
  - ensure that agreement has been sought from courts for the observation of practice in court
  - discuss arrangements to meet regularly with the head of service
  - agree practical arrangements as needed, such as work space
  - identify a link support person for the inspection and arrangements for interviewing staff
  - provide information for affected/relevant staff such as copies of the summary of the framework that explain the purpose of the inspection (see Annex C)

- discuss how the experiences of children, young people and families can be considered as part of the inspection. Cafcass will be asked to make contact with the children, young people and families and to obtain their consent to observe any meetings and speak to inspectors
- give the head of service the opportunity to provide up to three examples of good and best practice.

52. When planning the inspection, inspectors should ensure that:

- support is provided to facilitate communication with children, young people, carers and parents who require additional support
- practice observations should not be carried out if the time needed to travel is excessive
- practice observations allow enough time before/after to speak to family court advisers and, where appropriate, to children, young people, their carers and their family, and that consent of children, young people and families is sought
- the planning allows 30 minutes and travel time between any observations, meetings and interviews
- names and job roles of those attending meetings are specified for the inspector attending to observe practice
- staff are given the opportunity to provide their evidence separately to those who manage them
- if the need for any meeting arises as a result of the case-tracking, the deputy lead inspector asks for this as soon as the need becomes apparent; such meetings may be held by telephone as well as in person
- where sufficient information has been gathered to make judgements against the evaluation schedule and lines of enquiry may be closed, the deputy/lead inspector will advise Cafcass if scheduled meetings are no longer required.

### **Inspection team meetings**

53. Full team meetings will take place on the final day of each week of the inspection. The lead inspector will speak with the three deputy lead inspectors daily to ensure evidence is collated and consistency of approach is achieved.

54. The team should meet to:

- share findings and evidence
- triangulate findings and evidence
- develop and close down lines of enquiry
- provide time to reflect as a team

- build up an evidence-based view of the quality of practice within Cafcass
  - keep the lead inspector fully aware of any key developments
  - enable the lead and deputy lead inspectors to coordinate the inspection effectively.
55. Meetings should reflect key themes identified through evidence gathering and ensure that a holistic view of children and young people’s experiences in Cafcass, both locally and nationally, are being collated.
56. It is expected that:
- team meetings will be focused and efficiently chaired, enabling each team member to contribute effectively within agreed timescales for the meeting
  - all inspectors will be prepared and will contribute
  - all inspectors will keep the deputy/lead inspector informed of emerging issues, including cases or areas of practice that are causing concern and areas of strength and potential areas for improvement
  - all inspectors will collate their evidence in preparation for the team meeting and develop clear, evidence-based headlines to share with the team.
57. The full team will also meet for an extended period on the penultimate day of the final week on-site to discuss findings, agree provisional judgements and identify areas for improvement.

### **Observations of practice**

58. Observation of practice is a key evidence-gathering activity. Observations will be evaluated in line with the criteria set out in the evaluation schedule and as exemplified in Annex G.
59. During any observations of practice, inspectors will be sensitive to the potential pressures on, and the apprehension of, children, young people, families and staff. Inspectors will consider and discuss the appropriateness of each observation and whether they should observe whole or part of the activity. Any observation of planned meetings will be with the explicit and informed consent of the children, young people and families, and where in court with the consent of the judiciary. The relevant practitioners will be asked to gain this consent and inspectors will confirm it with the children, young people and families. Inspectors will explain that the purpose of the inspection is to assess the effectiveness of Cafcass practice with children, young people, their families and carers; it is not to make judgements about individuals.
60. Inspectors will target their inspection activity where they are most likely to gather robust evidence within the time available. This may involve observing:

- work with children and young people in an office environment
  - work with adult service users in an office environment
  - where travel time is not an issue, home visits
  - private law court duty work
  - where possible, early public law hearings.
61. Inspectors will ask managers to observe practice alongside them in some instances, in order to provide opportunities to discuss with managers their own evaluation of practice. After any observation of practice, the inspector is likely to have a brief discussion with the child, young person and family about their experience of the services received and their impact.
62. The inspector will have a brief discussion with the practitioner (and manager if present) about what they have just observed. They will not provide judgements about the practice observed, but will evaluate what they have seen and discuss their overall impression.
63. Inspectors will endeavour to undertake an average of one practice observation per day. Inspectors will always observe one court duty in each service area.

### **Hearing the views of children and young people and their families**

64. There are various ways to hear the views of children, young people and their families. These include:
- direct testimony
  - views of representative groups – for example the Young Person’s Board
  - views directly recorded in case files and meeting minutes
  - views expressed by practitioners
  - analysis of the annual questionnaires
  - reviewing complaints.
65. Inspectors will discuss any risks or ethical issues concerned with meeting children and family members with the family court adviser in order to determine whether it is in the best interests of the individual concerned.
66. Inspectors will provide Cafcass with guidance to help prepare children, young people, carers and families to be involved in the inspection.<sup>1</sup> Cafcass should gain the consent of the children and young people and families before involving them in the inspection and they should be given the option of a discussion by telephone.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex D. Template letter for families

67. The lead inspector will also want to see and hear the impact of local consultation with all children, young people and families to demonstrate how their feedback has:
- been asked for both individually and collectively
  - been taken into account and, where appropriate
  - impacted on practice, strategy, service development and design (where appropriate).
68. Inspectors will work with agencies to ensure that any child or young person with communication difficulties has access to the necessary support to facilitate her/his full involvement in the inspection.

### **Interviews with practitioners and/or managers and stakeholders**

69. Inspectors will triangulate evidence by talking to practitioners and/or managers, either by telephone or in person. The deputy/lead inspectors will only request that groups of people are brought together for discussion where this is the only way to triangulate evidence and is based on lines of enquiry arising from case-tracking. Cafcass will not be asked to schedule a plan of meetings.
70. Children and young people's experiences are the focus of this inspection. Meetings with groups are likely to arise only as a consequence of evaluating case practice and will be limited in number. Where meetings do occur, the inspector leading the group will usually identify the key practitioners and agencies to be represented.
71. Inspectors will always interview the CE, NSD, heads of service for those areas visited, and the chair of the Cafcass Board or nominated representative.
72. Because of the short notice given before these inspections, where these individuals are not available, inspectors may talk to those who are deputising for them in their absence. The deputy/lead inspector will determine which other managers or practitioners they need to make contact with, such as representatives from the national improvement team.

### **National and local family justice system**

73. In evaluating Cafcass it is important to understand their performance in the context of the national and particularly local family justice system. Inspectors will always make contact with the local authorities as part of their evidence-gathering process to hear their experience of Cafcass performance and their perspective on the local family justice system.
74. Inspectors will usually speak with the local judiciary (likely to be the local Designated Family Judge and/or the chair of the family proceedings court bench) and/or court administration (court manager, family court listing officer or clerk to the family justices). Interviews will usually be by telephone.

75. Inspectors will usually speak with the chair of the local family justice board and where this is a Cafcass manager a representative from at least one other agency. A telephone call with the chair of Family Justice Board may be useful to triangulate information from the minutes of the Local Family Justice Board and to discuss Cafcass's commitment to the family justice review and performance targets, if these are not clear.
76. Ofsted will not make judgements about family justice partner organisations or the judiciary in the report, but will report system-wide strengths and weaknesses.
77. The range of information-gathering will vary according to the lines of enquiry in each area and will need to be proportionate. However, the following may be helpful to consider:
  - Minutes of the Local Family Justice Board – this board is influential as a catalyst for change in the family justice system. Review of minutes will enable inspectors to understand the priorities of the board and the involvement of Cafcass and its engagement and influence in improvement activities.
  - Most recent data on the duration of care cases – nationally and by local area. Cafcass 'heat maps' can provide data on trends for up to five years. Where this has not been included in the pre-inspection briefing, it can be requested from Cafcass. This should show time from application to conclusion, but will need inspectors to explore Cafcass's influence and impact on issues of tackling delay.

## **Documentation**

78. The inspection team will review the documentation requested in Annex A. In exceptional circumstances, the lead inspector or other members of the inspection team may request additional evidence. Where documentation is presented but has not been requested by an inspector, it will only be evaluated where it directly relates to the evaluation schedule for the inspection. Cafcass will be expected to be explicit about what it believes to be the relevance of other material provided and direct inspectors to specific aspects of the documents presented.

## **Engaging the heads of service and the senior leadership team during the inspection**

79. The CE/NSD nationals and each head of service locally or another member of the senior staff will be informed of emerging findings throughout the inspection. This is likely to be on a daily basis in the form of brief face-to-face meetings that may involve any other inspectors from the team. This gives Cafcass the opportunity to challenge and understand emerging findings.

80. Although the deputy/lead inspector should offer the CE/NSD/head of service opportunities for engagement, this is not mandatory. The extent to which Cafcass senior managers engage with the inspection team will not influence inspection judgements.
81. These meetings will be informed by the headlines from the team's meetings. Where there are concerns about individual children and young people, these will be shared at the earliest opportunity and written feedback requested on the action taken and/or current circumstance for the young person (Annex G).
82. They will be sharp, focused meetings. The deputy/lead inspector should check that the CE/NSD/head of service is clear about the relationship between the evidence and the emerging and/or substantiated judgements.
83. Each deputy lead inspector will provide headline findings to the local head of service prior to leaving site. At this stage, these will not be judgements, but key areas of strength and areas for development.

### **Finalising evidence**

84. The inspection team will meet off-site on the Thursday in the final fieldwork week (week five) to finalise their evidence and agree their judgements. In the morning they will discuss the service areas visited that week. In the afternoon they will weigh the evidence against the grade descriptors outlined in the evaluation schedule. Inspectors will make a judgement of 'good' where the characteristics set out in the framework are widespread and common practice and are demonstrably leading to improved services and quality of advice to the court, both of which are most likely to contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings. A judgement of 'good' will be made where the inspection team concludes that the evidence overall sits most appropriately with a finding of 'good'. This is what Ofsted describes as 'best fit'.

### **The next steps meeting**

85. On the final on-site day, the CE/NSD and senior leaders will be invited to meet with the inspection leadership team to hear the judgements and, most importantly, the evidence that supports these judgements. There should be 'no surprises', as key strengths and areas for improvement should have been part of the daily meetings. This is not a feedback meeting. The CE/NSD will be informed of the judgements prior to the meeting.
86. Only a small number of attendees will be invited. This will usually be the CE, NSD and those heads of service that have been directly involved in the inspection.

87. The CE, NSD and senior leaders are invited to engage in this final discussion about the evidence and the areas for improvement and areas of good practice in order to:
- fully understand the detail of the evidence that the team used to reach judgements to support improvement
  - take the opportunity to clarify any outstanding issues
  - have a clear understanding of the areas for improvement that are likely to follow the inspection
  - provide transparency about the inspection and next steps
  - reduce the need for extended feedback.
88. So that judgements are clear and to inform the discussion with Cafcass, inspectors should produce bullet-pointed summary evidence that highlights strengths and areas for improvement across the scope of the inspection in preparation.
89. The lead inspector will outline the team's final judgements. Then the inspection team will describe to Cafcass the detail of the evidence that supports their judgements and the areas where they have had debate. They will invite dialogue and discussion about what this means. The discussion should be child-focused and clearly relate to the scope of the inspection, looking at the experience of children and young people through evidenced examples. The lead inspector will ask each inspector to identify any aspects of good practice that they have seen and have evidence for, and any areas that they have identified that require improvement.
90. Cafcass should be engaged in the discussion about the evidence so that the areas for improvement are clear. The inspection team should be clear about what will make the most difference.

### **Formal headline feedback at the end of the inspection**

91. Before leaving Cafcass on the last day of fieldwork, the lead inspector must make clear:
- the provisional grades for each judgement as set out in the evaluation schedule
  - that the grades may be subject to change because of quality assurance checks and should, therefore, be treated as confidential until Cafcass receives a copy of the final inspection report
  - the key strengths and areas for improvement that support the overall judgement including any areas for priority action
  - the procedures for publishing the report
  - the complaints procedure.

92. As there will be regular dialogue or close engagement with the CE/NSD during the inspection, there should be no need for a lengthy or formal final feedback session. There should be no new information presented at this stage. Where the CE/NSD have been involved in discussion with inspectors at the next steps meeting, they should already have a clear and detailed understanding of the inspection outcomes before the feedback. However, there will always be a short meeting at least that focuses on the key headline findings.
93. All inspectors in attendance may have a role in feedback, affording the opportunity for dialogue and clarification where appropriate. Roles will be determined by the lead inspector. A deputy lead inspector will compile a contemporaneous note of the attendees and the content of the feedback.
94. The lead inspector will confirm that the draft inspection reports will be sent to the CE/NSD.

## Supplementary guidance

### Issues of concern

95. Where serious issues of concern arise, for example in relation to the failure to follow safeguarding procedures and/or where a child is discovered to be at immediate risk of significant harm, the senior manager nominated by Cafcass will be notified as soon as possible.
96. Inspectors should be aware of Ofsted's safeguarding policy and procedures<sup>2</sup> and follow their own appropriate reporting procedure ensuring that Ofsted's social care compliance team are always notified via the National Business Unit helpline - 0300 123 1231 - if they need advice. The quality assurance manager will also be informed. Where the matter relates to the immediate safety of children, Cafcass will be asked to provide a response and explanation. The concern and request for a response will be confirmed in writing to the Chief Executive and head of service at the earliest opportunity.
97. Where inspection evidence suggests that there are weaknesses in practice in other providers or agencies that Ofsted regulates or inspects, this information will be documented clearly in every inspection and will inform future inspections.

### Recording evidence

98. Throughout the inspection process, each inspector will maintain contemporaneous records of the evidence obtained from all aspects of the inspection process. The record of evidence will be in a bound book (the evidence notebook) used for that inspection only that is dated, legible and signed by the inspector. Evidence may be scrutinised for quality assurance monitoring and will be considered in the event of any complaint.
99. Inspectors should take account of the following when compiling their evidence notebooks:
  - evidence should be clear, and the source, date and time of the meeting/recording of the evidence should be noted
  - evidence should be outcome-focused, evaluative and clearly linked to the evaluation schedule.
100. In addition, inspectors should maintain a summary of evidence and analysis (the SEA) that becomes part of the shared evidence for the inspection. The detailed evidence is held in the inspection notebook. The SEA is a summary of the inspector's evaluation and individual entries may relate to more than one source of evidence or more than one case. This will be coordinated by the lead

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<sup>2</sup> *Ofsted safeguarding policy and procedures* (100183), Ofsted, 2010;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ofsted-safeguarding-policy-and-procedures](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ofsted-safeguarding-policy-and-procedures).

inspector. Reports must be based on robust inspection evidence. To ensure this is the case, final judgements will not be made until the lead inspector is satisfied that the record of shared evidence for the inspection is complete.

101. As far as possible, the SEA should not include anything that could identify individual staff, individual children, young people or family members. Only job titles of staff and only case reference numbers and/or initials of cases should be recorded.
102. Ofsted will retain the summary of evidence in accordance with its published retention policy.<sup>3</sup>

## Writing the report

103. The lead inspector will identify specific inspectors for writing sections of the report. It is the lead inspector's responsibility to collate all the information into a final report following the fieldwork. The draft report should be of a quality that requires little or no further editing.
104. Reports should be:
  - concise, evaluative documents, written in clear, straightforward language and free of jargon
  - a fair and accurate reflection of the local area being inspected, with text, balance and tone that reflect the quality of children's experiences
  - aligned closely to the inspection requirements as set out in the relevant guidance, framework and evaluation schedule
  - written so that they highlight outstanding practice and identify clear areas of strength and improvement for Cafcass; the report must strike a balance between being accessible to a wider audience and being of value to Cafcass
  - based on robust inspection evidence and outline judgements in line with published criteria from the evaluation schedule
  - accessible and include a summary section that is written for children and young people
  - sufficiently clear, precise and detailed about areas for development to give Cafcass a good basis for subsequent action to lead to improvement.

## The summary of key findings section

105. This section should be a brief summary of Cafcass's strengths and where improvement is required why this is the case. The order of this section will depend on the overall judgement.

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<sup>3</sup> Handling and retention of inspection evidence (100122), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100122](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100122).

106. The summary should highlight any outstanding practice and state the strengths clearly. It should be final section of the report to be written and will be based on the detailed information in the body of the report. This section should be accessible to children and young people and relate to their experiences.

### **Areas for improvement/areas for priority action**

107. Areas for improvement should be precise, specific and detailed. Where there is a judgement of inadequate, the report must clearly indicate the areas for priority action for Cafcass.

108. If appropriate, areas for improvement may also focus on helping Cafcass to maintain and further develop areas of good and outstanding performance.

### **All other sections of the report**

109. Inspectors should inspect against the full evaluation schedule, identifying the key aspects of practice that support the judgements, including strengths and weaknesses.

110. While all areas of the evaluation schedule must be inspected, the report should focus on the key strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors do not need to write a section of the report about each of the evaluation schedule's criteria, but they must include enough detail in the report to support their judgement. Reports should focus on the experiences of children and young people in line with the scope of the inspection.

111. The final version of the report will be published on the Ofsted website and a copy will be sent to Cafcass.

### **Quality assurance**

112. All inspectors are responsible for the quality of the inspection and inspection report, with the lead inspector taking overall responsibility. As the inspection team is responsible for the inspection, all issues should, wherever possible, be resolved within the team, with oversight by the lead.

113. Each inspection will have a lead quality assurance manager assigned by Ofsted.

114. The role of the quality assurance manager is to challenge the evidence to ensure judgements are robust and that evidence has been gathered in line with the expected methodology; to provide support and guidance to the lead/team; and to oversee the final report to publication.

115. All inspectors are expected to quality assure their own and other inspectors' work during inspections. The lead inspector has overall responsibility for ensuring that all the evidence gathered is robust, reliable and secure.

116. A quality assurance manager will speak to the lead inspector and inspection team. They will also attend any inspection team meetings taking place during

their visit. This inspector will always seek views from Cafcass on the conduct of the inspection. The quality assurance manager will sample the way that evidence is being gathered and test Cafcass's understanding of the emerging findings.

## Complaints

117. The great majority of Ofsted's work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns do arise during an inspection, they should be raised with the lead inspector or quality assurance manager as soon as possible during the inspection visit. This provides an opportunity to resolve the matter before the inspection is completed. Any concerns about the factual accuracy of the findings in the report can be raised after the inspection and will be considered as part of the quality assurance process.
118. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a formal complaint can be raised under Ofsted's complaints procedure:  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130128](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130128).

## **Annex A. Information and data request**

This data and information request will be passed to the Chief Executive/National Service Director (CE/NSD) at the beginning of the inspection

### **Child level data**

Cafcass will be asked to provide a full list of all cases closed across the whole national organisation in the two weeks prior to the inspection commencing. The data field for each case should include:

- Case ID
- Case name
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Disability (Y/N)
- Date of birth
- Lead application
- Law type
- Case type (for example, safeguarding letter only, s7, r16.4, s25, s31 etc.)
- Practitioner
- Team
- Service area
- Local authority (Public law)
- Court
- File location (if not electronic).

### **Further documentation**

#### *National*

- Key national strategies and plans which relate to the evaluation schedule
- Workforce strategy and national training needs analysis
- Partnership and commissioning strategy
- Senior leadership and operational management team minutes
- National Family Justice Board minutes.

*Local*

- Local business plan
- Data on unallocated cases
- Information on local partnerships and commissioning
- Training needs, delivery and evaluation information
- Court sitting dates
- User appointments in the service areas where inspectors plan to visit (practice observation)
- Service area management meeting minutes
- Local Safeguarding Children Board/Local Family Justice Board minutes
- Information about annual appraisals
- Cafcass National Improvement Service audits/reports/health checks, etc.

## Annex B. Email to notify the Chief Executive of the start of the inspection

Dear **[insert name of the Chief Executive]**

### Inspection of Cafcass

This email is to inform you that today **[insert date]** Ofsted is beginning the national inspection of Cafcass. The inspection will take place over a four-week period.

<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Week 4</b>
Lead inspector on-site at national office; two inspectors on-site in National Business Centre on Monday. <b>Remainder of the inspection team off-site</b>	Full inspection team on-site in three service areas Tuesday to Thursday	Full inspection team on-site in three service areas Tuesday to Thursday	Full inspection team on-site in usually two service areas Tuesday and Wednesday. On-site at national office on Friday

I have spoken to **[insert name and title of manager or 'to you']** to inform **him/her/you** that the inspection will commence in line with the guidance published on our website.

We will be evaluating casework, which will involve visiting offices to talk to staff, reading files and considering and observing front-line practice.

The arrangements to identify the cases we will evaluate and the practice we will observe are all set out in the [Inspection handbook: Inspections of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service \(Cafcass\)](#).

All inspections are subject to a quality assurance process undertaken by a named quality assurance manager. If there are any issues the inspection team cannot resolve, you may wish to discuss these in the first instance with the manager for this inspection. This person is **[insert name]** and can be contacted on **[insert number/email]**.

## Annex C. Information for Cafcass staff

### Inspection of Cafcass

This inspection is to evaluate the effectiveness of Cafcass as a national organisation. Full details about the inspection are available in the *Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspection of Cafcass*.

Inspectors will be sensitive to the potential pressures on, and the apprehension of, staff being interviewed. The purpose of the inspection is not to make judgements about individuals but to ascertain the extent to which Cafcass keeps children best interests at the heart of its work; listens to children and young people; safeguards and promotes children's welfare; and provides the best advice to the family court.

The contact details of the inspectors are detailed below, should you wish to make contact to discuss any issues outside the interview.

Evidence will be gathered in a variety of ways, including:

- reading case files
- directly observing practice
- attending meetings
- shadowing staff
- interviewing staff and partners
- meeting with key partners
- discussions with children and where appropriate members of their family.

Inspectors will spend time with staff to:

- observe practice
- assess the quality of work to support children
- examine the quality and impact of supervision and management oversight.

Inspectors will meet with senior managers throughout the fieldwork to ensure that they understand the emerging findings. At the end of the inspection, the final overall judgements will reflect the body of evidence collated and evaluated by the inspection team.

This is an inspection of the national organisation and feedback will be given centrally. However, the deputy lead inspector working in your service area will provide headline findings to the local head of service prior to leaving site. At this stage these will not be judgements, but key areas of strength and areas for development.

Feedback to Cafcass at the end of the fieldwork will be chaired and managed by the lead inspector. The Chief Executive or their representative will always be present and will determine who else to invite. This could include other managers, Cafcass Board members and any key stakeholders.

Following the inspection, the lead inspector will write a report about the findings of the inspection. The inspection report will be sent to Cafcass to check factual accuracy and will be published on the Ofsted website four weeks after the end of the inspection.

Thank you for your assistance with this inspection.

Confidentiality will be respected unless the safety and welfare of a child is compromised by the withholding of that information.

Ofsted inspectors are currently conducting an inspection of Cafcass in this area. If you wish to speak to an inspector please contact:

Name of inspector(s):

Mobile number:

## Annex D. Template letter for families

Dear Parent/Carer

### Inspection of Cafcass

We are undertaking a national inspection of Cafcass and this will include Cafcass in **[insert CSA name]**. I am the inspection team leader and I am writing to invite you to meet or have a telephone conversation with a member of the team to help us to understand the help and support you have been given by **[insert CSA name]**.

This inspection will involve the team and me interviewing the people you have been working with and reading information about the work they do. However, it is also important that we speak to parents and children so that we can fully understand your views and experiences.

With your permission, the inspectors may want to sit in to observe meetings or meet separately with you and other children, young people and families. When they do this, they are looking to see how well Cafcass workers are working to help children and their families involved in family court proceedings. When they talk to you, they will want to hear how well you think you have been listened to. They will want to see how well Cafcass is doing at promoting your child's welfare and giving the right advice to the family court.

Inspectors are not checking up on you or your family and you do not have to share any personal information with them. We will make sure that what we write or talk about will not in any way lead to you being identified. If you tell us anything about a child or young person being harmed or at risk of being harmed we would have to make sure the right agency gets that information.

At the end of the inspection, the inspectors write a report (this will not name you or anyone in your family). This is then sent to Cafacss and is also published on the Ofsted website. The inspector isn't able to tell you all individually what the outcome was at the end of the inspection, but you can read the report online <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report>.

We really want to talk to you and understand your experiences. I hope this letter will reassure you and enable you to agree to talking and/or meeting with us.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please either telephone me on **[insert phone number]** or email me at **XXXX@ofsted.gov.uk**. I always do my best to respond promptly but forgive me if there is a short delay at this busy time of inspection.

## Annex E. Evaluating the effectiveness of individual children’s case files and observing practice

This tool should be used to ensure that the team is consistently recording evidence during reading of case files. It brings together the key relevant criteria from the evaluation schedule. The evidence will be recorded in individual inspectors’ records of evidence. The evaluative summary will be recorded on the summary of evidence and analysis (SEA). Inspectors will record evidence including highlighting areas of good practice. In addition, inspectors should always consider whether case files have identified issues for partner inspectorates.

Priority is afforded to evidence concerning the quality and effectiveness of help, care and protection and the impact this has on children, young people and families.

The evaluation schedule reference numbers refer to the characteristics of a good service outlined in the framework and evaluation schedule for these inspections. Number one refers to the first characteristic of the key judgement ‘the quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with families’. The bullet points in the framework are numbered sequentially thereafter. The numbering excludes the bullet points that describe a service that is outstanding, requires improvement or is inadequate.

### Private law

Possible evaluation schedule reference	Criteria (where relevant/applicable)
1, 7, 9	Welfare safeguarded and promoted / best interests
2	Advice and recommendations to the court
3	Advice to families
4	Avoiding delay
5	Risk assessment
6	Wishes and feelings
7, 9	Assessment – children and young people seen and seen alone
8	Planning
10	Court partnership and practice
11, 12	Reports, analysis, recommendations flow from the body
13	Case recording
14	Information sharing

## Public law

Possible evaluation schedule reference	Criteria (where relevant/applicable)
15, 16, 21	Welfare safeguarded and promoted / best interests
17, 22	Advice and recommendations to the court
19	Advice to families
18	Representation of the child
23	Wishes and feelings
20	Avoids delay
29	Added value
24, 26	Assessment – children and young people seen and seen alone
25	Planning
20, 32	Consultation with independent reviewing officers during at the end
27	Court partnership and practice
28, 29	Reports, analysis, recommendations flow from the body
30	Case recording
31	Information sharing

## Annex F. Referring concerns about individual children and young people back to Cafcass

Case no. HMI referring Date of referral	Cafcass team	What are the serious issues of concern and reasons for referral?	Cafcass response	Inspectors' view of Cafcass response

Serious issues of concern are where the inspection team need further information from Cafcass to assure them that an individual child or young person is not left at risk of significant harm or where some aspects of a child's plan or care do not appear to be in their best interests.