

# What children said about how Cafcass should be inspected in the future

A report on the responses to consultation

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This report is written for children and young people and is about what they told us about how Cafcass (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) should be inspected in the future.

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## Contents

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<b>Who we are</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What does Cafcass do?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What is this report about?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Who answered the questions?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What children and young people said about each of the questions we asked</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What did adults say to us?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>What will happen next?</b>	<b>10</b>

## **Who we are**

We are called Ofsted. Our inspectors check on schools and services that help and look after children and young people. One of the services we inspect is called Cafcass.

When we inspect Cafcass, we check what they do to help children and young people. We also check on what they do for parents and how good the advice is that they give to the family courts that make decisions about where children live. We decide how good this help is and write a report about what we have found and decided.

We are not part of the government, but we tell the government what we think about Cafcass.

## **What does Cafcass do?**

Sometimes, families have problems they find hard to sort out by themselves. These are problems like deciding who a child should live with if the family is not staying together or if it is not safe for a child to stay with their family. That's when a judge in a court can help. The judge listens to everyone's views and decides what is best for the child. These judges work in courts called 'family courts'.

Cafcass has people who help judges to decide what is best for children. They do this if the family isn't able to agree things between themselves or it is not safe for a child to live with their family. Cafcass workers talk with children and young people and their families who are going to court. The Cafcass worker tells the court what they think would be best for the child or young person. This is to help the judge to decide important things like where they should live, and who they should still be able to see and spend time with.

## **What is this report about?**

We want to make sure our inspections make things better for children and young people and we want to make some changes to how we inspect Cafcass. We asked children and young people what they thought about our ideas for inspection. We did this by asking them to go online and answer some questions. Some children and young people sent us their answers on paper. We did this in January, February and March this year.

This report tells you about the questions we asked children and young people about inspecting Cafcass in the future. It tells you the main things people said about our ideas to change how we do our inspections. It says what children and young people told us, and some of the main things adults told us too. Then it tells you what we are going to do next.

## Who answered the questions?

Altogether, 98 people answered our questions to tell us what they thought. Thirty-one of these people said they were aged 18 or over. We have written about what they said in a separate report about what adults told us.

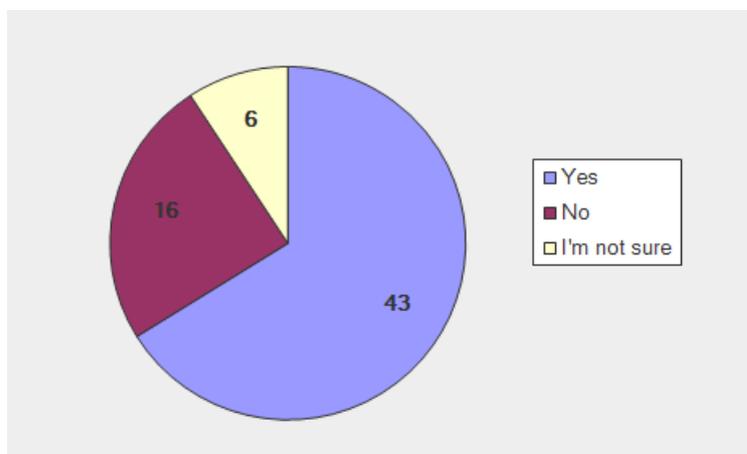
Cafcass has a Young People’s Board to give it advice, so we also asked the young people on that Board what they thought too. Some of the 30 young people on that Board have done some work as young inspectors, so we wanted especially to hear their views.

## What children and young people said about each of the questions we asked

### Question 1: Do you think we should do one big inspection of Cafcass each year, looking at the Cafcass head office and up to six of the 17 areas?

There were 65 children and young people who answered this question:

- 43 said yes
- 16 said no
- 6 said they were not sure.



The children and young people who said yes to one big inspection said this is a good idea because Ofsted can check how well Cafcass staff do their job.

Ofsted could also see what happens across the whole of Cafcass. One young person said *'It is important to do a big inspection to ensure Cafcass is being run correctly'*. Others thought that it would give Cafcass the chance to find out what it does well and what it can do better.

The children and young people who didn't think one big inspection was a good idea were worried that if only some Cafcass areas are inspected each year then some things might get missed in the other areas. Some said they would prefer lots of smaller inspections instead of one big inspection. Two of the reasons for this were:

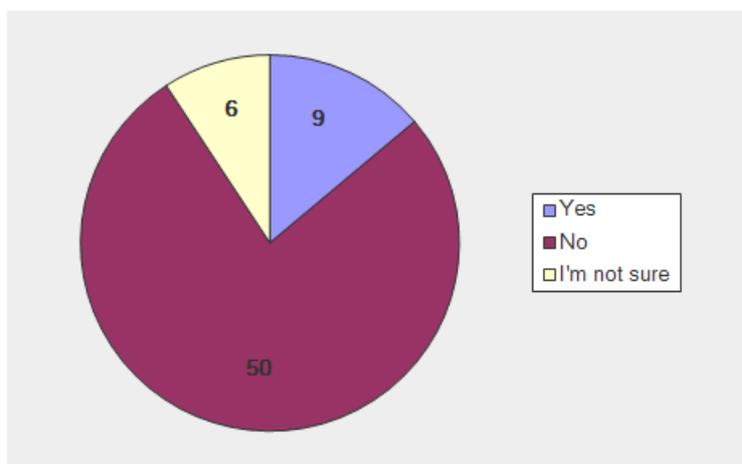
- *'I think the small inspections of Cafcass is better than one big inspection, it involves all 17 areas than just a particular few and seems the wiser thing to carry on doing.'*
- *'I think it should be lots of small inspections to be able to see the difference in places.'*

The Cafcass Young People's Board said it's important that inspectors can see what happens in each office because this is where children and young people meet Cafcass workers. They said that Cafcass was good at learning from its mistakes and so it's important that each area knows where they need to improve.

### **Question 2: Do you think we should tell Cafcass when we are going to inspect?**

There were 65 children and young people who answered this question:

- 9 said yes
- 50 said no
- 6 said they were not sure.



Some children and young people said we should tell Cafcass when we will inspect so they can make sure the right people will be there for the inspection. One young person said:

- *'If they know they can make sure that they are available for you to inspect them but the advance time of notice should not be too close.'*

Most children and young people said that we shouldn't tell Cafcass we are coming to inspect. They said this was so inspectors can see Cafcass as it usually is and nothing

could be changed because Cafcass knows that inspectors are coming. Some children and young people said:

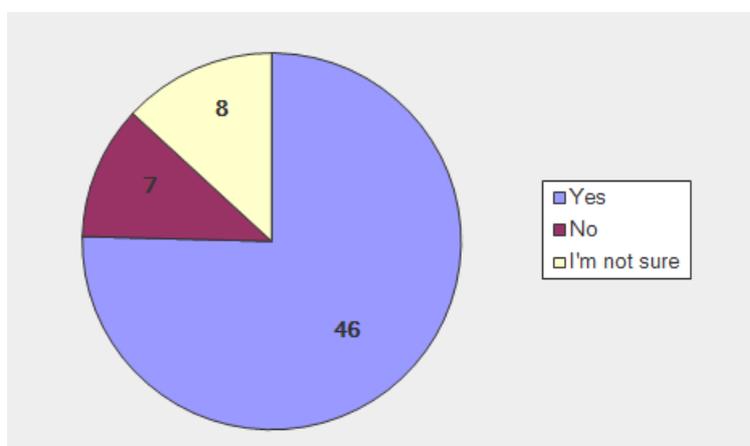
- *'You need to see what Cafcass are like on a day to day basis.'*
- *'That way you can see them in action and nothing has changed due to an inspection.'*
- *'Because this way they can't change the way they act.'*

The Cafcass Young People's Board felt very strongly that we shouldn't tell Cafcass. Those who had been young inspectors had seen how the offices in each area were different. Some offices worked well and in others not so well. They worried that things might have been changed if staff had known Ofsted were coming.

### **Question 3: Do you think we should use an online survey to get the views of children and young people?**

There were 61 children and young people who answered this question:

- 46 said yes
- 7 said no
- 8 said they were not sure.



The children and young people who said we should use an online survey agreed because it's important to get the views of children and young people. They said that an online survey is available to everyone and is quick, easy to access and no-one has to give their name. It also means that children and young people don't have to talk to inspectors – instead they can say what they think from home. Because of this, they felt children and young people would be more likely to give us their views. Some children and young people said:

- *'everyone gets a chance to do the survey when it affects them, not just the people that the inspectors may speak to. Everyone affected is allowed to express their views.'*

- *'Gives young people who are shy or have missed the chance to speak in person a chance to voice their views.'*

Those who didn't agree with an online survey, or weren't sure, thought that children and young people wouldn't want to complete a survey and then we might not get many views. Some children and young people said that not everyone has access to the internet.

One idea from the Cafcass Young People's Board was to have a survey with a small number of questions and a reward for completing it. However some members thought that offering a reward might mean that we get lots of responses but that the comments might not be very helpful. Other members suggested leaving a paper survey in Cafcass offices which could be filled in and then left in a feedback box (most offices have one of these). They also said that Ofsted could use the young inspectors to get feedback.

**Question 4: Do you think these are the right things to make a decision on? Do you think we should always say:**

**How well Cafcass helps children to be safe and stay safe?**

There were 60 children and young people who answered this question: 55 said 'yes', 1 said 'no' and 4 said they were 'not sure'.

**How well Cafcass works with children?**

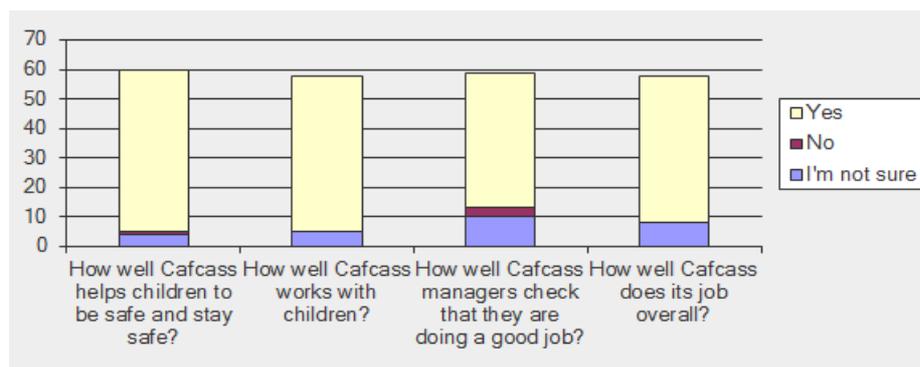
There were 58 children and young people who answered this question: 53 said 'yes', no-one said 'no' and 5 said they were 'not sure'.

**How well Cafcass managers check that they are doing a good job?**

There were 59 children and young people who answered this question: 46 said 'yes', 3 said 'no' and 10 said they were 'not sure'.

**How well Cafcass does its job overall?**

There were 58 children and young people who answered this question: 50 said 'yes', no-one said 'no' and 8 said they were 'not sure'.



Most children and young people agreed that these are the right things for inspectors to look at. They said that these were important areas and it would help people know if Cafcass was doing a good job. It also means that Cafcass can see what it needs to do better and this would then help it to improve. One young person said:

- *'Management is important and child safety and working with children is paramount. With the overall job, it is important to not let good or bad things in specific areas be lost in the overall view.'*

The Cafcass Young People's Board agreed that Ofsted should always make decisions about the things we said above. But they did also say there are two important things that we should always check. These are how well Cafcass makes sure children and young people's views are always heard and how welcoming the office is where children and young people go to meet Cafcass workers. They said that clean and friendly offices made a big difference to a child's experience of Cafcass.

### **Question 5: Please tell us anything else about how you think we should inspect Cafcass**

Children and young people took the opportunity here to tell us how important it is to ask children and young people what their views are and listen to what they say.

## **What did adults say to us?**

As well as the questions we asked children and young people, there were also questions for adults. There were 118 adults who told us what they thought and we wrote a separate report this. Many adults said the same things as children and young people.

### **Doing inspections every year**

Most adults said that there should be one big inspection of Cafcass every year. But, like children and young people, they did worry that if all areas aren't inspected every year then some things might get missed.

### **Telling Cafcass when we inspect**

Adults also agreed that we shouldn't tell Cafcass when we will inspect. They thought this would mean that Ofsted could see what Cafcass is really like. They did say that this could mean that there was less time for inspectors to talk to children and young people.

### **Online surveys**

Adults agreed we should use an online survey to get the views of children and young people. Some adults thought that inspectors should also meet with children and

young people. They also said that some children and young people would need help to complete the survey.

### **What inspectors make decisions about**

Adults mostly agreed with the things that Ofsted would make decisions on. But they also said how important it is for inspectors to see how Cafcass staff work with children and adults, and to talk to people, including children and young people.

For more information about what adults said, please see the report on our website, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130246](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130246).

### **What will happen next?**

We looked at everything that children, young people and adults told us and we made some decisions about how we will inspect Cafcass in future.

We will do one big inspection of Cafcass, looking at the head office and at up to eight of the 17 areas. If inspectors find things are not good, we will go back the following year, but if things are good, we will leave a bigger gap until the next inspection.

Doing one big inspection of Cafcass can take more time to make all the arrangements. We have decided that to get the right balance between time to prepare the inspection and not giving too much notice so that Cafcass can change things, we will give Cafcass short notice – two hours.

It is really important that we get the views of children and young people. Cafcass told us that when they used an online survey to get the views of children, not many children completed it. We decided that, instead, we will talk to children on the telephone and during the inspection (if their parents or carers agree with this).

We will still look at the things listed in question 4, but we will look at how well Cafcass does these things in the individual areas and how well overall.

### **More information**

You can find out more information about how we will inspect Cafcass on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130244](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130244).

**Thank you**