

Future of social care inspection

Consultation document

This consultation seeks your views on proposed changes across Ofsted's inspections of children's social care. It has four parts:

- principles for children's social care inspections
- a new approach to inspections of local authority children's services from 2018
- a new common inspection framework for social care establishments, agencies, boarding schools and residential special schools from April 2017
- changes to inspections of independent fostering agencies.

This consultation is open from 28 June to 9 September 2016.

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Foreword by Eleanor Schooling

Every inspection framework is unique. However, the experiences and learning from earlier frameworks are the foundations for our proposals. So too are the discussions we have had over time with colleagues. This consultation is about our principles for inspection. However, no consultation about principles can generate fruitful discussion without some sense of what those principles would look like in practice.



Inspection can help to do good for children. For that reason, our new frameworks will seek out the things that matter most in children's lives, and help to identify where practice could be better without waiting for too long. They will be more proportionate where areas and providers have shown sustained good practice. Our aim is to ensure that more authorities and providers are, and remain, good. We propose to be consistent in our expectations of providers and focus on what matters most to children.

Our proposal for a common inspection framework for a wide range of settings – mostly those settings we regulate, but also the residential provision for boarding schools, residential special schools and further education colleges – sets out clearly and simply what aspects of care and support we will always look at closely, wherever children live or receive help. More specifically, the proposal to return more quickly to inspect independent fostering agencies that are less than good means that we will be able to target better our resources on those services most in need of improvement.

We are proposing a universal inspection, possibly over two weeks, once every three years for all local authorities except those that are inadequate. The inspection should be the single event where a judgement is given about the impact of the local authority's work on children. It should be proportionate and, in some instances, could be less than two weeks long.


However, we want to work with local authorities to avoid drift downwards and help those that need to become good. We suggest a programme of modular inspections for short scrutiny of identified issues, followed by a letter outlining what needs to happen for them to remain or become good.

For too long, our role has not been clear enough where things go wrong. An inadequate judgement is challenging for a local authority. In those cases, we will be clear about what systemic change is needed to improve work with children.

We have already begun our new monitoring system for inadequate authorities. It will continue as a strong building block for our new approach. This monitoring gives detailed information about practice, what is happening to children and how well a local authority is progressing. In turn, this helps the authority to know what to tackle next and what to work on with any partners. The monitoring will allow us to evaluate

when to return for an inspection to move the local authority out of inadequate with an overall judgement. It will also inform any decision about alternative models for delivery. This means decisions that are in the best interests of children will be taken at a reasonable pace.

The system I have outlined is based on my experience that shows inspection can and does drive improvement if we get the right approach. It is easy, and sometimes necessary, to identify what is not good enough. We now need to turn our significant expertise to increasing the number of agencies, establishments and local authorities where systems, social workers, other professionals and carers do what matters most to children well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eleanor Schooling". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eleanor Schooling
National Director, Social Care

Introduction

1. This document sets out our proposals in four key areas.
 - **The principles of social care inspection** – this section sets out three principles that we think should govern inspections of children’s social care.
 - **Inspections of local authority children’s services** – this section sets out our proposals for the overall approach to inspections of local authority children’s services. The inspection framework will be based on your response to these proposals. We will start a targeted consultation with local authorities and other key stakeholders on the detail of the inspection framework later in 2016.
 - **A social care common inspection framework (SCCIF)** for all establishments, agencies, boarding schools and residential special schools and residential provision in further education colleges. The framework will mean that same judgement structure will apply in each of these settings, we will evaluate and report on a set of common issues in every inspection, our methodology will be underpinned by the same key principles and we will ensure that there is consistency in what ‘good’ looks like for children and other users.
 - **Specific changes to Ofsted’s inspections of independent fostering agencies (IFAs)**, including a proportionate response to agencies judged as good or outstanding:
 - all agencies will be inspected at least once every three years
 - we will return more quickly to inspect agencies that are judged inadequate (usually within six to 12 months)
 - we will return more quickly to inspect agencies requiring improvement (usually within 12 to 18 months)
 - we will reduce the notice period of inspection of IFAs from 10 working days to one working day.
2. We will use the information gathered through the online consultation and through consultation events to finalise the revised arrangements for Ofsted’s social care inspections. These will take account of your views. We expect to:
 - start the new inspections of local authorities in 2018, after we complete the single inspection programme
 - implement the SCCIF from April 2017, including any agreed changes to the arrangements for the inspections of independent fostering agencies.
3. This consultation is open from the 28 June to the 9 September 2016.

How do I respond to the consultation?

There are three ways of completing and submitting your response.

Online electronic questionnaire

Visit www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SCInspection to complete and submit an electronic version of the response form.

Download and email

Visit www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-social-care-inspection to download a Word version of a questionnaire and complete the questions on your computer. When you have completed the form, please email it to socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk with the consultation name in the subject line: the future of social care inspection.

Print and post

Visit www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-social-care-inspection to print a Word or PDF version of the response form that you can fill in by hand. When you have completed it, please post it to:

Social Care Policy Team
Ofsted
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

This consultation is open from 28 June to 9 September 2016.

Part one: the principles of social care inspection

4. We propose that social care inspections should be governed by the three principles outlined below.

Focus on the things that matter most to children's lives

There is now a general consensus across all the professional groups that we work with that inspection should focus on the experience and progress of children. We regularly ask children, and the adults who look after them, what it is about children's experience and progress that matters most. Using this to guide us, we will focus the criteria for our judgements on the difference providers are making to children's lives. Adults can only support children effectively if they are also given the time, resources and information they need to do this well. So we will also take account of the quality of the support that the adults who care for children receive.

Be consistent in our expectations of providers

It is important that professionals and members of the public can compare providers that do similar things. We will aim to make this comparison possible wherever it is a legitimate comparison, by being consistent in what we expect. We will make our expectations consistent by basing our judgements on criteria that share the same underlying principles and focus, and by using guidance and inspection methods that are only different where there is a good reason to make them so. This will include taking a similar approach to determining the frequency of inspections.

Focus on services that are less than good

We believe that once providers are good, they are likely to stay good. In each sector, we will consider whether it is appropriate to return less often, or to do a more proportionate inspection, where leaders and managers have shown that they can deliver well for children. We will always take into account the risk to children of not inspecting as frequently. We will use a broad range of information to tell us if standards are slipping. We will always keep the ability to go back to good and outstanding providers more quickly if we have concerns.

Do you agree with our proposed principles that inspection should:

- focus on the things that matter most to children's lives
- be consistent in our expectations of providers
- focus on services that are less than good.

What other principles do you think we should have?

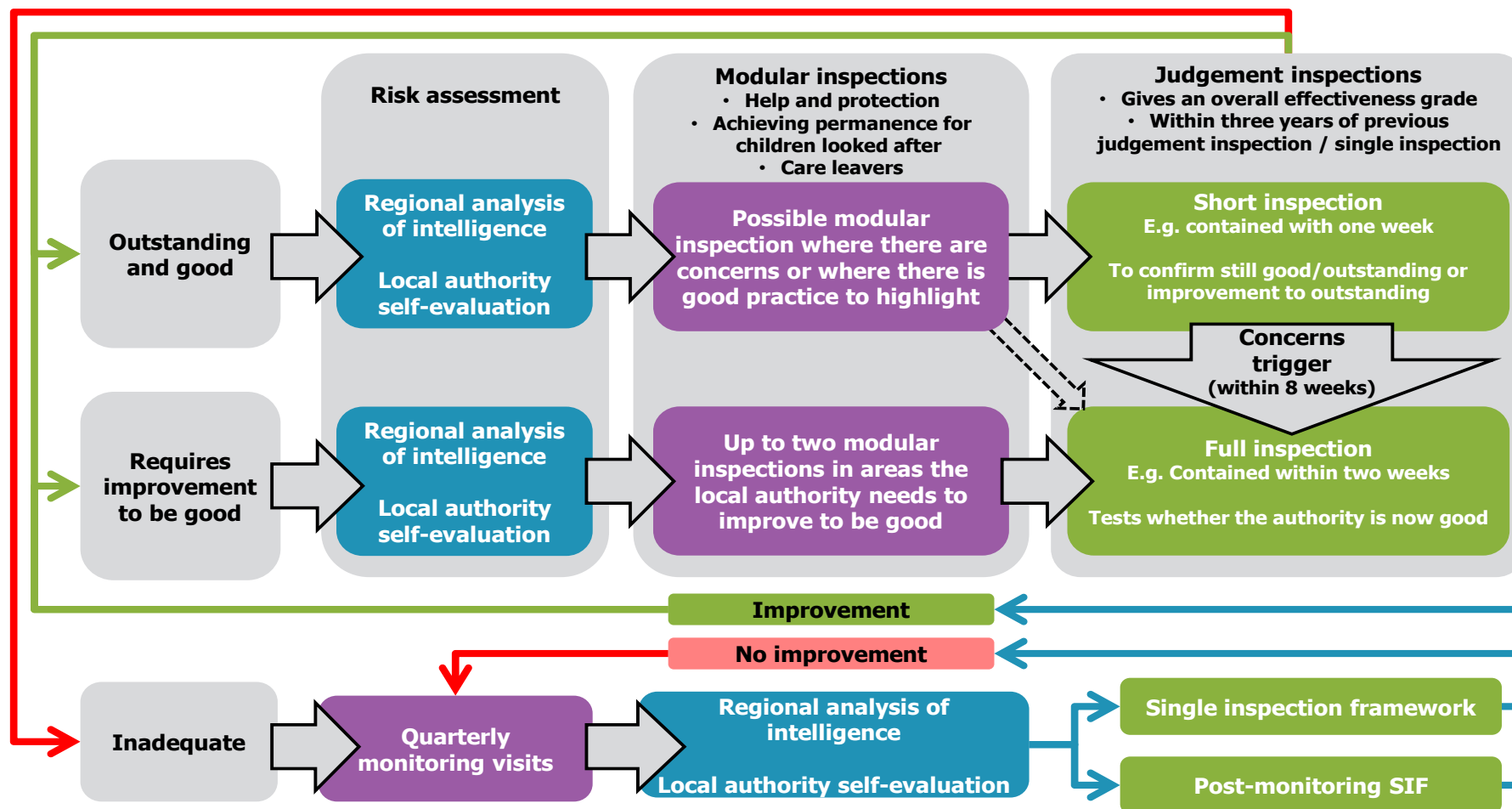
Part two: the inspection of local authority children's services

5. This section outlines the principles for the new programme of inspection of local authority children's services from 2018.
6. By the end of 2017, we will have completed inspections in all local authorities under the single inspection framework.¹ This covers inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. This will generate a comprehensive assessment of all local authorities' children's services, providing an effective starting point for the transition to a more risk-based and proportionate programme of inspection.
7. This consultation document outlines the principles that we propose should govern the new local authority inspection programme, which we will put into place in 2018. We will use the response to this consultation to inform the development of a more detailed inspection framework and methodology. We will share this with the people it affects later this year.
8. We recommend that you read this section in full before responding, as your answers to specific questions may affect your view on questions that appear later. Please bear in mind that this document is about the overall approach and principles. There will be further opportunities over the coming months to explore the detail.
9. The consultation seeks your views on:
 - the approach to inspection of local authority children's services
 - the judgements we will make
 - the role of local authority's self-evaluation of practice
 - the new 'judgement' inspection
 - the role of modular inspections
 - introducing the new approach.

¹ 'Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers', Ofsted, 2013;
www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-framework.

The overall approach to inspection of local authority children's services

10. Currently, we inspect the full range of local authority children's services in a single inspection. We propose that our new programme includes a mixture of shorter, more focused inspections. This new approach reflects our guiding principles that inspection should:
 - focus on the things that matter most to children's lives
 - be consistent in our expectations of providers
 - focus on services that are not yet good.
11. We propose that each inspection should take account of the earlier performance of each local authority. The diagram on the next page sets out the proposed model.



Local authorities requiring improvement to be good

12. All authorities requiring improvement to be good will receive a full judgement inspection within three years of their last inspection. We propose that, in the interim years, they will also receive short, focused, modular inspections (likely to be no more than a few days long) in the areas where performance may be weaker. Modular inspections will identify, through a narrative report, strengths and areas for improvement to help authorities to become good.

Good and outstanding local authorities

13. Good and outstanding local authorities will also receive a judgement inspection within three years of their last inspection. However, to reflect previous strong performance, these will be shorter inspections.
14. The short judgement inspection is not simply a cut-down version of the full judgement inspection. It will include an evaluation to determine: if the local authority has maintained the quality of practice, the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers, and the strength of the local authority's self-evaluation of front-line social work practice.
15. Where concerns arise during the interim years, we may decide to carry out a modular inspection to identify steps to maintain a good or better service. If significant concerns arise during a short judgement inspection, we propose to return, in no more than eight weeks, to complete a full judgement inspection. We will also use modular inspections to identify and share good practice.

Inadequate authorities

16. We propose to use the arrangements for monitoring inspections published in May 2016.² These state that all inadequate authorities will receive quarterly monitoring visits. Each visit, apart from the first, will result in a published report. These monitoring reports and other intelligence will help determine when the re-inspection will take place.
17. We will re-inspect local authorities that are inadequate in all judgement areas using the single inspection framework (SIF). If local authorities are inadequate in only some judgement areas, we will consider doing a more focused post-monitoring single inspection.
18. All inadequate local authorities will receive quarterly monitoring visits and a single inspection until they cease to be inadequate. At that point, they will become subject to the arrangements that involve modular and judgement inspections, as outlined above.

² 'Monitoring local authority children's services judged inadequate: guidance for inspectors', Ofsted 2016; www.gov.uk/government/publications/monitoring-local-authority-childrens-services-judged-inadequate-guidance-for-inspectors.

19. We think it is important that an inadequate local authority is re-inspected using the SIF or post-monitoring SIF, so that we have the information we need when they move into the more proportionate inspections outlined above.
20. If any local authority is judged inadequate at their full judgement inspection in the new programme, they will be subject to the monitoring activity and subsequent re-inspection, as outlined in the previous paragraphs.

Modular inspection

21. We propose that modular inspections are short inspections over two to three days. Inspectors will look at a specific part of the child's journey to check that the quality of services has been maintained and to support an authority's improvement journey up to their next full judgement inspection. We propose the three modules are:
 - children in need of help and protection
 - achieving permanence for children looked after
 - care leavers.
22. We propose to report the findings from these modular inspections in a narrative form with no graded judgement.

Should local authority inspections be proportionate, taking account of earlier inspection outcomes and other intelligence/data?

If inspections were proportionate, do you agree that:

- there should be a longer judgement inspection in local authorities that require improvement to be good. This inspection will evaluate whether there is enough evidence to judge the authority as good or better
- there should be a shorter judgement inspection in good and outstanding local authorities. This inspection will focus on an evaluation of practice to determine if the local authority has maintained or improved their performance and to test the effectiveness of their self-evaluation of front-line social work practice
- where Ofsted identifies concerns on a short judgement inspection that suggest a local authority has not maintained good or outstanding performance, we should return within eight weeks to undertake a full judgement inspection?

Do you agree that Ofsted should carry out short modular inspections:

- in local authorities that require improvement, to monitor their progress and support them on their journey to becoming good
- where we have concerns about practice in any local authority, to test whether performance may have deteriorated
- in a sample of good or outstanding local authorities, to identify and share good practice?

Should we have modular inspections on each of these areas in the new programme:

- child in need of help and protection
- achieving permanence for children looked after
- care leavers
- Others – please specify?

The judgements we will make

23. We believe that our inspection reports must provide enough information to local authorities to support them to improve. However, they should also provide the public and the government a clear message about the experiences of children and the effectiveness of services that help, protect and care for them.
24. To provide these clear messages, we will use our standard four-point judgement scale (outstanding, good, requires improvement to be good and inadequate) in the full and short judgement inspections. We will make a graded judgement on overall effectiveness and provide a narrative that explains the reasons for this judgement and gives local authorities the information that they need to recognise their achievements and support improvement.
25. The modular inspections that will complement the full and short judgement inspections will not include graded judgements. We will provide narrative findings through a letter that sets out key strengths, areas for development and areas of priority action.

For judgement inspections, we will make an overall effectiveness judgement. Should we also provide a graded judgement on these inspections for the following parts of the service:

- children in need of help and protection
- achieving permanence for children looked after
- care leavers
- leadership and management
- Others – please specify?

Do you agree that, for modular inspections, we should report our findings through a narrative without graded judgements?

Local authority self-evaluation of practice

26. We think that the local authority's self-evaluation of the quality of front-line social work practice could play an important role in informing when we undertake an inspection and, in the case of modular inspections, the focus of the inspection.
27. We propose that each local authority should share their self-evaluation with us annually. We hope to see a self-evaluation that outlines:
 - what the local authority knows about the quality of its social work practice
 - how the local authority knows this
 - the local authority's strengths and their priorities for improving social work practice
 - who was involved in carrying out and agreeing the self-evaluation.
28. We will use this to inform its inspection programme. We do not intend to ask the Department for Education (DfE) to create regulations to require this, because continuous self-assessment is already considered standard good practice in local authorities. If a local authority chooses not to provide one, the lack of up-to-date information available to us would be a factor in deciding when we next inspect. A local authority may choose to provide an update at any time to inform our inspection planning. The inspection framework will set an expectation on the local authority to provide an update at the point of inspection.
29. The sector itself should lead the design of any model. It should support improvement of the local authority, not be produced solely for the purpose of inspection.
30. Wherever possible, the guidance on self-evaluation and the criteria within the inspection framework should align. This is so that we take a whole-system approach, with shared expectations and standards.

Should we ask that local authorities provide their annual self-evaluation of social work practice? If you agree, when should they provide it?

Should we ask local authorities to provide an update to their self-evaluation at the point of inspection?

The new judgement inspection

31. We propose to introduce new full and short judgement inspections that we will carry out in all local authority areas. They will give a graded judgement about overall effectiveness (unless the local authority is judged inadequate, in which case we will use our separate monitoring and re-inspection arrangements).³
32. Inspectors will look at the same local authority practice and services at each inspection. This is so that we can generate a national picture of comparative performance. However, for local authorities previously judged good or outstanding, we will do the short inspection. Where data, intelligence or the findings of modular inspections suggest concerns, good or outstanding authorities may still receive a full judgement inspection.
33. We propose that the new full and short judgement inspections will take place in each local authority within three years of their previous inspection. Under this proposed model, the inspection will be proportionate by adjusting aspects of the methodology – for example, the number of cases tracked and sampled, not the range of services that inspectors will evaluate or the frequency of the judgement inspection.
34. We propose that the full judgement inspection should have fieldwork that lasts no longer than two weeks and for a short judgement inspection, no longer than one week. In this time, it is not possible to inspect the full range of services that is currently a part of the four-week single inspection. However, any aspect of service (or the experiences of any group of children) could be in the scope of a modular inspection. We think both the full and short judgement inspections will, through case-tracking and sampling, evaluate the experiences and progress of a sample of children:
 - at the point of referral and assessment, which will enable inspectors to scrutinise the effectiveness of early help
 - in need of protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation
 - looked after and the effectiveness of arrangements to achieve permanence
 - returning home, children 'stepped-down' to early help and care leavers.
35. In both the short and full judgement inspections, we intend to continue with our focus on direct practice with children and families, working alongside practitioners. We also plan to enhance our evaluation of whether the organisation and its leaders have created the right environment and organisational culture for practice to flourish, rather than the quality and impact of strategies. We will look at how leaders and managers improve practice

³ 'Monitoring local authority children's services judged inadequate: guidance for inspectors', Ofsted 2016; www.gov.uk/government/publications/monitoring-local-authority-childrens-services-judged-inadequate-guidance-for-inspectors.

through innovation that enhances the quality of experiences children have and the progress that they make.

36. We know that announcing inspections can mean local authorities offering, or being asked for, more information before fieldwork. This increases the overall burden of inspection on local authorities and Ofsted alike. Also, children and young people have told us that they have greater confidence in unannounced inspection findings. However, unannounced inspections can make it challenging for local authorities to provide information that is essential to plan and deliver an inspection focused on children’s experiences. Children and young people are also sometimes reluctant to speak with inspectors if they receive too little notice. We are considering whether each of our inspection types is best delivered unannounced.
37. Depending on the consultation response and final inspection methodology, we may ask a local authority to provide information or carry out some activity just before the fieldwork. If this is the case, team inspectors would not be on site to gather evidence at this time. The lead inspector will likely be on site for up to one day to help the local authority plan and set up the inspection and begin gathering evidence.

Should the judgement inspection look at the experiences of a sample of:

- children at the point of referral and assessment, which will enable inspectors to scrutinise the effectiveness of early help
- children in need of protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation
- children looked after and the effectiveness of arrangements to achieve permanence
- children returning home, children ‘stepped-down’ to early help and care leavers
- others – please specify?

Do you think our inspections of local authority children’s services should be unannounced or have a short notice period?

You may have a different view for each inspection outlined in this consultation.

Introducing the new approach

Transition period

38. When we introduce the new programme in 2018, the judgement inspection will usually take place within three years of the previous judgement inspection. In the early part of new the programme, we will use the date of the local authority's single inspection to determine when the first judgement inspection should be. However, we are moving from a universal programme delivered over four years to a proportionate rolling programme of inspection. So, we need to have a transition period where the timing of the first of these new judgement inspections for each local authority is decided more flexibly.
39. During this transition period, each local authority's next inspection will be the most appropriate for its particular circumstances. We will take account of when its single inspection took place and its grade. All inadequate local authorities will remain in the quarterly monitoring and re-inspection arrangements, outlined above, until their judgement improves and they are no longer inadequate. The table below gives some possible scenarios for local authorities that we inspected in the early part of the single inspection programme and so the time to their first judgement inspection may exceed three years.

	Last inspection	Overall judgement	Next likely inspection
Authority A	Spring 2014	Requires improvement	Full judgement inspection early in 2018
Authority B	Autumn 2013	Good	Short judgement inspection during 2018
Authority C	Summer 2015	Requires improvement	Modular inspection in 2018 followed by full judgement inspection within a year
Authority D	Autumn 2015	Good	Short judgement inspection in 2019
Authority E	Summer 2016	Inadequate	Continuation of monitoring visits in 2018 followed by a re-inspection under the SIF. If overall effectiveness has improved, a judgement inspection within three years of the re-inspection.

Other local authority area inspections

40. In addition to the programme described above, we will continue to carry out joint targeted area inspections (JTAIs) with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), HMI Constabulary and HMI Probation. We may carry out a JTAI instead of a modular inspection, but this will not be as well as the proposed number of JTAIs (up to 10 a year). This will happen by exception, where the inspectorates' forward plan allows. Where we have done a JTAI, this will fully inform our programme of modular and judgement inspections.
41. Ofsted and CQC's joint local area special educational needs and disabilities inspection will start a five-year cycle from April 2016, ending March 2021. The last three years will overlap with this new social care inspection programme.
42. We will work together closely to ensure that both these programmes are coordinated to prevent any local authority area being subject to too much inspection in a short space of time.

Sector engagement in inspection

43. We continue to explore how we can most effectively enable serving leaders to be seconded to inspect alongside our HMI. We think that these new shorter inspections, particularly the monitoring visits and modular inspections, will make the opportunities for secondment more accessible to local authority leaders.

Do you agree that the new approach provides opportunities that are more accessible for prospective secondees from local authorities to work with us on inspections?

Part three: a common inspection framework for social care settings

44. We propose to implement a common inspection framework for the following social care settings, in April 2017:

- children’s homes, including secure children’s homes
- independent fostering agencies
- voluntary adoption agencies
- adoption support agencies
- residential family centres
- residential holiday schemes for disabled children
- boarding schools and residential special schools⁴
- further education (residential provision).⁵

45. A social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) will mean that:

- we will apply the same judgement structure across a wide range of settings
- we will report on a set of overall criteria at every inspection
- wherever possible, the specific evaluation criteria will be similar across settings
- we bring shared guidance across our inspection of settings into one coherent document
- our inspection methodology will be based on the common principle of focusing on the experiences and progress of children, while addressing the unique and distinct aspects of each type of setting.

46. While the SCCIF will not encompass the following inspection frameworks, due to a lack of ‘fit’ with current or proposed frameworks, the same principles will apply to:

- local authority inspections
- Cafcass
- secure training centres.

⁴ This framework does not apply to independent schools inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) or the School Inspection Service (SIS).

⁵ This includes residential provision for young people under 18 in further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and 16–19 academies.

47. Currently, there are too many differences in the criteria to make judgements and too many different pieces of guidance for inspectors and providers (usually known as inspection handbooks) across the range of social care settings that we inspect.
48. Evaluation criteria for the different frameworks do not sufficiently provide a common view of what good looks like for children and other users. For example, the judgement structure and evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies and for children's homes are different, despite the fact that many children who are in public care spend time in both types of care provision during their childhood. Wherever they live, many of their needs, ambitions and expectations remain largely constant.
49. It is important that we set out clearly the benchmarks for good care or help for children, wherever they live or receive help. We must also provide clear, concise and consistent published guidance. We will streamline current guidance for inspectors into two parts of a consolidated inspection handbook.
 - **Part one** will provide guidance that is common across all settings.
 - **Part two** will include, when necessary, specific guidance for each type of establishment or agency, including additional evaluation criteria that inspectors will use to make their judgements.
50. The framework will provide greater consistency to our expectations of providers. It will improve comparability of children's experiences and progress across different settings.
51. **The SCCIF does not mean that we are looking to raise the bar for good and outstanding judgements.** We are not proposing wholesale or significant changes to the core methodology for inspections, except for the accompanying proposals for changes to inspections of independent fostering agencies.
52. We will pay close attention to our agreed principles for any future changes to the way we inspect different settings, such as the frequency or notice of inspections. We will consult on any significant changes to inspection methodology that are extra to the proposals set out in this consultation.
53. We believe that the SCCIF, with its consistent focus on the experiences and progress of children, will provide a durable platform for bringing into line inspections of different settings. It will allow us to add any changes to the way we inspect into the framework more easily in the future.
54. We will consult on the detail of the specific evaluation criteria for each type of setting later in the year, ahead of April 2017, when we propose to introduce the SCCIF.

55. Please see Appendices 1 to 9 for information about what the SCCIF will mean for the following providers:

- children’s homes, including secure children’s homes
- independent fostering agencies
- voluntary adoption agencies
- adoption support agencies
- residential family centres
- residential holiday schemes for disabled children
- boarding schools and residential special schools
- further education (residential provision).

Do you agree that Ofsted should introduce a new social care common inspection framework from April 2017?

The focus of inspections

56. Our inspection methodology will have a consistent and clear focus, through case tracking and sampling, on evaluating the experiences and progress of children and young people. This will mean that:

- inspectors will spend less time looking at policies and procedures and more time looking at the impact of settings on children’s lives
- we will give the minimum notice of inspection, so that we can see settings as they are on a day-to-day basis, and to reduce as much as possible the expectations on providers to prepare for inspection
- we will explain as clearly as possible ahead of inspections the information that inspectors will need to assist the inspection and to ensure that providers are able to provide their best evidence.

Making judgements under the common inspection framework

57. The common inspection framework will mean that the same judgements are made across the different settings and agencies.
58. The proposed judgement structure is informed primarily by our first principle of inspection: that we will focus on the things that matter most to children’s lives.
59. This judgement structure was first applied in April 2015 for our inspections of children’s homes. The response from the sector has been extremely positive. Placing the progress and experiences of children at the core of inspections has helped us all to focus more closely on those things that make the most difference to children.

60. Inspectors will use the four-point scale⁶ to make judgements on:
- overall experiences and progress of children⁷, taking into account:
 - how well children are helped and protected (limiting judgement)
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
61. The judgement about how well children and young people are helped and protected will be a **limiting judgement**. This means that if inspectors judge this area to be inadequate, then the overall 'experiences and progress of children' judgement will always be inadequate.
62. The judgement of the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers is a **graded judgement**. If inspectors judge this area to be inadequate, this is likely to lead to an overall 'experiences and progress' judgement of inadequate and certainly not a judgement that exceeds requires improvement.
63. By making these judgements limited and graded, we are now explicit about something that was at least implicit in current and previous frameworks. For example, children not being safe has always been a key determining factor in arriving at an overall inspection judgement. We are not consulting on whether there should be limiting or graded judgements.
64. Inspectors will make the limiting and graded judgements first so that they can take these into account in arriving at the overall progress and experience judgement.

Do you agree that we should apply this judgement structure to all inspections under the common inspection framework?

What inspectors will consider when making judgements

65. Inspectors will cover a set of key areas of evidence outlined in the SCCIF to make each judgement. The areas are common to all the types of provision covered by the SCCIF and will usually be covered in all inspection reports.
66. A revised inspection handbook will contain detailed guidance that reflects the common and different characteristics of each type of setting. The guidance will explain the methods inspectors use to gather evidence. It will also set out specific evaluation criteria used by inspectors for each type of setting, complementing the main SCCIF areas of evidence.

⁶ Grade 1: outstanding; grade 2: good; grade 3: requires improvement; grade 4: inadequate.

⁷ Inspections of adoption support agencies, voluntary adoption agencies and residential family centres will also consider, as appropriate, the experiences of adult service users.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people⁸

67. The 'overall experiences and progress' judgement takes account of findings from the judgement on help and protection and the judgement on the effectiveness of leaders and managers. It also includes:
- the quality of individualised care and support provided and the influence and impact of the provider on the progress and experiences of children
 - the quality of relationships between professionals, carers and children
 - the progress children make in relation to their health, education, and emotional, social and psychological well-being
 - how well children's views are understood and taken into account and how their rights and entitlements are met
 - the quality of children's experiences on a day-to-day basis
 - how well children and young people are prepared for their futures and how well transitions are managed
 - how the particular needs of children and young people who live a long way from home are met.
68. Inspectors will report on each of the areas in paragraph 67 unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so.

Do you agree with the key areas that inspectors will evaluate in making the proposed 'overall experiences and progress of children and young people' judgement?

How well children and young people are helped and protected (key judgement)

69. This judgement takes account of:
- how well risks are identified, understood and managed and whether the support and care provided help children and young people to become increasingly safe
 - the response to children that may go missing or may be at risk of harm, including exploitation, neglect, abuse, self-harm, bullying and radicalisation

⁸ Inspections of adoption support agencies, voluntary adoption agencies and residential family centres will also consider, as appropriate, the experiences of adult service users; evaluation of experiences and progress will take into account the context of some provision, such as the short-term nature of residential holiday schemes for disabled children.

- how well staff manage situations and behaviour and whether clear and consistent boundaries contribute to a feeling of well-being and security for children and young people
- whether safeguarding arrangements to protect children meet all statutory and other government requirements, promote their welfare and prevent radicalisation and extremism.

70. Inspectors will report on each of the areas in paragraph 69 unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so.

Do you agree with the key areas that inspectors will evaluate in making the proposed 'how well children and young people are helped and protected' judgement?

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

71. This judgement takes account of:

- whether leaders and managers show an ambitious vision, have high expectations for what all children can achieve and ensure high standards of care
- how well leaders and managers prioritise the needs of children and young people
- the extent to which children and young people continually make progress from their starting points across all aspects of their development,⁹ as leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the progress children and young people are making in respect of the plan for them
- whether leaders and managers provide the right supportive environment for staff through effective supervision and appraisal and high-quality induction and training programmes, tailored to the specific needs of the children and young people
- how well leaders and managers know and understand the setting's strengths and weaknesses, prevent shortfalls, identify weaknesses and take decisive and effective action
- whether the establishment or agency is achieving its stated aims and objectives
- the quality of professional relationships to ensure the best possible all-round support to children and young people in all areas of their development
- whether leaders and managers actively challenge when the responses from other services are not effective

⁹ Recognising the impact of trauma, abuse and disability on actual or potential progress.

- the extent to which leaders and managers actively promote equality and diversity, and tackle bullying and discrimination.
72. Inspectors will report on each of the areas in paragraph 71 unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so.

Do you agree with the key areas that inspectors will evaluate in making the proposed 'effectiveness of leaders and managers' judgement?

Part four: inspections of independent fostering agencies

73. On 31 March 2015, there were 18,950 children looked after living with foster carers approved by independent fostering agencies (IFAs). This represented 27% of children looked after.
74. We inspect IFAs under the Care Standards Act 2000.¹⁰ The Care Standards Act 2000, including regulations made under section 22, sets out the legal basis for regulating IFAs.¹¹ It sets out our powers to register, inspect and, where necessary, enforce compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and relevant regulations.
75. Changes to the inspections of IFAs will be incorporated into the proposed SCCIF.

Frequency of inspection

76. Currently, IFAs have at least one inspection in a three-year period. In line with our key principle of focusing on those providers that are less than good, we propose that, while we will continue to inspect all agencies at least once within a three-year period:
 - we will usually return to agencies that are judged inadequate within six to 12 months
 - we will usually return to agencies that are judged to require improvement within 12 to 18 months.
77. We usually inspect those agencies that are good or outstanding within three years of their previous inspection. However, we may return later to agencies that have been judged good or outstanding for at least two consecutive inspections.
78. This will make inspection of IFAs more proportionate. This will also provide a sound understanding of the experiences and progress of a large group of children looked after. A more flexible response to different judgements will allow us to target our resources on those agencies where performance is not yet good. The frequency of inspections for all agencies will be determined by regular risk assessment. We will keep the right to return earlier than normally expected.

¹⁰ The Care Standards Act 2000; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents.

¹¹ The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011; and The Care Standards Act (Registration)(England) Regulations 2010; The Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Children's Homes etc.) Regulations 2007.

Do you agree that Ofsted should usually return to inspect independent fostering agencies that are judged as inadequate within six to 12 months?

Do you agree that Ofsted should usually return to inspect independent fostering agencies that are judged as requiring improvement within 12 to 18 months?

Notification of inspection

79. Currently, IFA inspections are carried out with 10 working days' notice. We propose that this is reduced to one working day.
80. This will bring notice periods more in line with the majority of our inspections. It will help to give inspectors a clear and realistic picture of the day-to-day operation and impact of the agency. We also believe that this will reduce the demands of preparing for inspection for agencies and other stakeholders.
81. We will provide a clear explanation of the information that we will need for inspections. This will ensure that the shorter notice period will not affect the ability of inspectors to gather evidence while on site.

Do you agree that the notice period for the inspection of independent fostering agencies should be reduced from 10 working days to one working day?

A revised judgement structure and evaluation schedule

82. In paragraphs 44 to 55 of this consultation document, we have set out our proposals and rationale for introducing a SCCIF. Inspections of IFAs will fall within the scope of the SCCIF.
83. Therefore, we propose that inspectors make judgements on the following areas, using the four-point scale.¹²
- Overall experiences and progress of children and young people¹³, taking into account:
 - how well children and young people are helped and protected
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

¹² Grade 1: outstanding; grade 2: good; grade 3: requires improvement; grade 4: inadequate.

¹³ Inspections of adoption support agencies, voluntary adoption agencies and residential family centres will also consider the experiences of adult service users.

84. This will replace the current judgement structure:
- overall effectiveness
 - the experience and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people
 - quality of service provision
 - safeguarding children and young people
 - leadership and management.
85. We will start targeted consultation on proposed specific evaluation criteria for IFAs as they apply to the SCCIF later in 2016.

Annexes: how the SCCIF proposals affect each type of provision

Annex 1: Children’s homes – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate all children’s homes against the new criteria in the SCCIF.
- No change to current judgement structure:
 - Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account:
 - how well children and young people are helped and protected (limiting judgement)¹⁴
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
- Current inspection guidance will be set out in a combined inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.
- No changes to inspection methodology. However, we would like to apply proportionality by reducing the frequency that we must inspect children’s homes. We are in discussions with the Department for Education about how we can achieve this. We will consult on any future proposals for change.
- The SCCIF does not mean that we are ‘raising the bar’. We will look at the current grade descriptors and, where necessary, we will amend to fit the SCCIF, keeping any changes to a minimum.
- We will make sure that representatives from the children’s homes sector, including providers, are fully informed about the development of the SCCIF as they apply to children’s homes.

Do you think that children’s homes should be part of the SCCIF?

¹⁴ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements

Annex 2: Secure children’s homes – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate all secure children’s homes against the new criteria in the SCCIF.
- Current judgement structure:
 - Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account:
 - how well children and young people are helped and protected (limiting judgement)¹⁵
 - the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement)
 - outcomes in education and related learning activities.
- This will be replaced by the following judgement structure:
 - Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account:
 - how well children and young people are helped and protected (limiting judgement)¹⁶
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
- Current inspection guidance will be set out in a consolidated inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.
- No changes to current inspection methodology. We do not expect any changes to the frequency of inspection for secure children’s homes.
- The SCCIF does not mean that we are ‘raising the bar’. We will look at the current grade descriptors and, where necessary, amend them to fit the SCCIF, keeping any changes to a minimum. We will look at the current descriptors for ‘outcomes in education and related learning activities’ and integrate them, as appropriate, within the new judgement structure. We will make a clear statement of the quality of educational provision and related learning activities in each inspection report.
- We will make sure that secure children’s homes sector representatives, including providers, are fully informed about the development of the SCCIF as they apply to secure children’s homes.

Do you think that secure children’s homes should be part of the SCCIF?

¹⁵ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements.

¹⁶ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements.

Annex 3: Independent fostering agencies – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate all independent fostering agencies (IFAs) against the new criteria in the SCCIF.
- Current judgement structure:
 - overall effectiveness
 - the experience and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people
 - quality of service provision
 - safeguarding children and young people
 - leadership and management.
- This will be replaced by the following judgement structure:

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account:

 - how well children and young people are helped and protected (limiting judgement)¹⁷
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
- Current inspection guidance will be set out in a combined inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.
- The SCCIF does not mean that we are ‘raising the bar’. Current grade descriptors will be revised to fit the SCCIF. We will look at the current descriptors for the ‘quality of service provision’ and incorporate these, as appropriate, into the new judgement structure.
- We are consulting at the same time on proposed changes to the way we inspect IFAs (paragraphs 73–85).
- We will start targeted consultation on proposed specific evaluation criteria for independent fostering agencies as they apply to the SCCIF later in 2016.

Do you think that IFAs should be part of the SCCIF?

¹⁷ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements

Annex 4: Voluntary adoption agencies – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate all voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) against the new criteria in the SCCIF.
- Current judgement structure:
 - overall effectiveness
 - the experience and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people
 - quality of service (this includes the experience and progress of adult adoption support users)
 - safeguarding children and young people
 - leadership and management.
- This will be replaced by the following judgement structure:

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account:

 - how well children and young people are helped and protected (limiting judgement)¹⁸
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
- Current inspection guidance will be set out in a combined inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.
- No significant changes to current inspection methodology. While we intend to review how inspections can be more proportionate, we will not propose any changes to how we inspect voluntary adoption agencies until the impact of the government’s planned changes in relation to adoption are clear.¹⁹
- The SCCIF does not mean that we are ‘raising the bar’. Current grade descriptors will be revised to fit the SCCIF. We will look at the current descriptors for the ‘quality of service provision’ and incorporate these, as appropriate, into the new judgement structure.
- We will start targeted consultation on proposed specific evaluation criteria for voluntary adoption agencies as they apply to the SCCIF later in 2016.

Do you think that VAAs should be part of the SCCIF?

¹⁸ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements.

¹⁹ ‘Adoption: a vision for change’, Department for Education, 2016; www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-a-vision-for-change.

Annex 5: Adoption support agencies – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate all adoption support agencies (ASAs) against the new criteria in the SCCIF.
- Current judgement structure:
 - overall effectiveness
 - the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, service users
 - quality of service provision
 - safeguarding children, young people, adults and families
 - leadership and management.
- This will be replaced by the following judgement structure:

Overall experiences and progress of service users, taking into account:

 - how well children, young people and adults are helped and protected (limiting judgement)²⁰
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
- Current inspection guidance will be set out in a consolidated inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.
- No significant changes to current inspection methodology. We intend to review how inspections can be more proportionate, but we will not propose any changes to how we inspect adoption support agencies until the impact of the government's planned changes for adoption are clear.²¹
- The SCCIF does not mean that we are 'raising the bar'. Current grade descriptors will be revised to fit the SCCIF. We will look at the current descriptors for the 'quality of service provision' and incorporate these, as appropriate, into the new judgement structure.
- We will start targeted consultation on proposed specific evaluation criteria for adoption support agencies as they apply to the SCCIF later in 2016.

Do you think that ASAs should be part of the SCCIF?

²⁰ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements.

²¹ 'Adoption: a vision for change', Department for Education, 2016; www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-a-vision-for-change.

Annex 6: Residential family centres – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate all residential family centres (RFCs) against the new criteria in the SCCIF.

- Current judgement structure:

The overall experiences of children and parents, taking into account:

- the quality of assessment (graded judgement)
- how well children and parents are helped and protected (limiting judgement)
- the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).

- This will be replaced by the following judgement structure:

Overall experiences and progress of children and parents, taking into account:

- how well children and parents are helped and protected (limiting judgement)²²
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).

- Current inspection guidance will be set out in a combined inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.

- No significant changes to current inspection methodology. We want to continue to make our inspections more proportionate. We will consider, with the DfE, what is the right frequency for inspections of residential family centres. We will consult on any changes.

- The SCCIF does not mean that we are 'raising the bar'. Following the recent consultation and changes earlier in 2016, we expect that any revisions will be minimal.

- We will look at the current judgement criteria for the quality of assessment and incorporate them, as appropriate, into the revised evaluation criteria. We will make a clear statement on the quality of assessment at each inspection of a residential family centre.

- We do not expect any further consultation, but will ensure that all residential family centres will see revisions to the criteria later in 2016.

Do you think that RFCs should be part of the SCCIF?
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²² See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements.

Annex 7: Residential holiday schemes for disabled children – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate all residential holiday schemes for disabled children against the new criteria in the SCCIF.
- No change to the current judgement structure:
 - Overall experiences and progress of children and young people²³, taking into account:
 - how well children and young people are helped and protected (limiting judgement)²⁴
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
- Current inspection guidance set out in a consolidated inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.
- No significant changes to current inspection methodology. We want to continue to make our inspections more proportionate. We will continue to discuss the suitable inspection frequency of holiday schemes with the DfE.
- The SCCIF does not mean that we are 'raising the bar'. Following the recent consultation and changes earlier in 2016, we expect that any revisions will be minimal.
- We do not expect any further consultation but will ensure that all RHSDCs will see revisions to the criteria later in 2016.

Do you think that residential holiday schemes for disabled children should be part of the SCCIF?

²³ Evaluation of experiences and progress will take into account different service contexts, including the time-limited nature of residential holiday schemes for disabled children.

²⁴ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements.

Annex 8: Boarding schools and residential special schools – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate the boarding and residential provision in schools, including residential special schools, against the new criteria in the SCCIF.²⁵
- Current judgement structure:
 - the overall experiences and progress of children and young people
 - the quality of care and support
 - how well children and young people are protected
 - the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers.
- This will be replaced by the following judgement structure:

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account:

 - how well children and young people are helped and protected (limiting judgement)²⁶
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
- Current inspection guidance will be set out in a consolidated inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.
- No significant changes to current inspection methodology.
- The SCCIF does not mean that we are ‘raising the bar’. Current grade descriptors will be revised to fit the SCCIF judgement structure. We will look at the current descriptors for the ‘quality of care and support’ and incorporate these, as appropriate, into the new judgement structure.
- We will start targeted consultation on proposed specific evaluation criteria for boarding schools and residential special schools as they apply to the SCCIF later in 2016.

Do you think that boarding schools and residential special schools should be part of the SCCIF?

²⁵ This will not apply to independent schools inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) or the School Inspection Service (SIS).

²⁶ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements.

Annex 9: Further education (residential provision) – what will the SCCIF mean?

- We will evaluate the residential provision in further education providers²⁷ against the new criteria in the SCCIF.
- Current judgement structure:
 - overall effectiveness
 - outcomes for young people
 - quality of service
 - safeguarding
 - leadership and management.
- This will be replaced by the following judgement structure:

Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking into account:

 - how well young people are helped and protected (limiting judgement)²⁸
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers (graded judgement).
- Current inspection guidance will be set out in a consolidated inspection handbook:
 - part one – generic guidance, common to all SCCIF settings
 - part two – specific guidance, unique to individual setting type, including specific evaluation criteria.
- No significant changes to current inspection methodology.
- The SCCIF does not mean that we are ‘raising the bar’. Current grade descriptors will be revised to fit the SCCIF judgement structure. We will look at the current descriptors for the ‘quality of service’ and ‘outcomes for children and young people’ and incorporate these, as appropriate, into the new judgement structure.
- We will start targeted consultation on proposed specific evaluation criteria for further education colleges as they apply to the SCCIF later in 2016.

Do you think that the residential provision of further education colleges should be part of the SCCIF?

²⁷ This includes residential provision for young people under 18 in further education colleges, sixth form colleges and 16-19 academies.

²⁸ See paragraphs 61–64 for further detail about limiting and graded judgements.

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