

[Amanda Spielman's speech at the 2022 National Children and Adult Services conference](#)

Good morning, it's great to be with you here in Manchester and to be talking to people from across the sector on my visits to children's homes, local authorities and schools.

What is clear from those conversations, and from everything we have seen through the year, is that this is still a challenging time for education and social care.

So, I also want to take the time to say thank you and your teams for the hard work you do, whether in education, social care or wider children's and adults' services.

There are more than a few pinch points in our sectors including workforce shortages, capacity pressures, and places for children with the most complex needs. There are also the big external factors such as an increase in asylum seeking unaccompanied children and your work supporting Ukrainian and other refugee families.

But despite this, we do know that you are un-deterred in your ambitions for children.

And I want to reassure you that we are too.

Our strategy

So, what are we at Ofsted doing?

Like you, we have continued with our work while adjusting to big changes in context. But we have also been looking to the future. We recently published a new [five-year strategy](#) taking us to 2027. This is a strategy that reflects on the last five years, especially the pressures the pandemic put on our sectors, but it does also look forward to recovery and beyond.

The strategy has been designed to understand and meet the challenges I mentioned. It will also support your sectors while maintaining our distinct role and perspective.

We have set ourselves eight strategic priorities and I want to talk about 5 of them:

- 'inspections that raise standards'
- delivering 'right touch regulation'
- 'keeping children safe'
- 'keeping pace with sector changes'

- and making sure children get ‘the best start in life’

The best start in life

I am sure that these will resonate with you, and I will talk through each of them, but I want to begin with ‘the best start in life.’

Children only get one childhood. Each of us has a role in making sure we are getting it right from the start. We make no apology for prioritising the early years.

Over the last year we have published [reports highlighting the serious impact the pandemic has had on some of the youngest children](#). We, like you, have been very concerned about the harm to them.

There are clear concerns about the impact on children’s social and wider development. Many have gaps in communication and language skills and are behind where they should be in personal, social, emotional, and physical development.

There is also a challenging backdrop as the early years sector adapts to the post-pandemic landscape. Parents are struggling to find childcare that is flexible to their needs and at a price they can afford. Alongside this, many workers are leaving the sector and those who stay are often struggling on low wages, exacerbated by significant rises in the cost of living. Making childcare affordable, while attracting well trained and motivated staff is incredibly difficult. We are very aware of this.

In the past, there has been a well-intentioned policy aim to treat childminders and nurseries alike. But part of what we are trying to do is to respect their different natures while maintaining high standards, wherever care is happening.

A young child’s development and learning, wherever they are, is crucial. It is why Ofsted is emphasising the importance of early years curriculum; what children are learning.

We are also going to extend specialist training for our early years inspectors; and we are continuing our early years research programme allowing us to share our insights quickly.

Inspections that raise standards

Which brings me on to our next strategic priority – ‘inspections that raise standards.’

Coming out of the pandemic, schools and nurseries told us they wanted stability and continuity, including in the inspection model. That is why we are allowing the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) to embed properly rather than change it to focus on pandemic recovery.

However, we have clarified how the EIF works for childminders. We updated the

[early years inspection handbook](#) in September to include specific guidance for childminder inspections. It includes information on the practical process, how our inspectors gather and evaluate evidence, and how they come to a judgement.

Inspection judgements are important because they inform parents, commissioners, and government about the standards being achieved. Our reports highlight good practice and areas for improvement.

The inspection process itself is designed around professional dialogue. Good leaders are the main drivers of improvement in their services. Professional dialogue helps them to improve and us to recognise and report good practice.

Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs)

We also want our inspections to encourage cross-sector working.

We have recently published our new guidance for [Joint Targeted Area Inspections \(JTAs\)](#). We will look at how children's social care, education, health, and the police, work together to reduce risks and harm to children and to give early help.

We know that getting the right help at the right time can prevent longer-term intervention. All these agencies must contribute to this.

Our JTAs will also look at how early help works and how children move between the categories of early help and children in need.

We hope that this work will make sure everyone in local areas thinks about their role in early support for families. We also expect that it will help the government as it considers children's social care reform.

Right touch regulation

We know that our 'right touch regulation' strategic priority is so important to the sector right now.

Proportionate and risk-based regulation is critical to ensuring good outcomes for children.

The principles of good regulation are straightforward: proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeting.

There have been several recent reviews and reports with recommendations for Ofsted and for the sectors we work with. We welcome these contributions and the ongoing discussions that they bring. We'll continue to support improvement based on the recommendations we and you have been making for a number of years to deliver the best possible outcomes for children.

Where there are lessons for Ofsted to learn, we will take that on board. We constantly strive to improve and change where we can see it will help.

We will continue to use our regulatory powers with careful thought and only where we have serious concerns. But, when we find care that is simply not good enough, it is right that we continue to act.

We know this can contribute to pressures on supply, but we cannot and will not accept sub-standard care for children. We know that there is increased demand, but the solution to that is not lower standards. It is increased supply.

But we are making changes that we believe will help you.

I want to give you 3 examples of where we are doing this.

Multi-building registration

The first is multi-building registration.

We recognised a need for more flexible and responsive provision for children, and an increasing demand for solo and specialised placements. Late last year we introduced the [multi-building registration of children's homes](#).

It means that a provider can now apply to register a single home where the care and accommodation is provided in more than one building. This reflects the changing ways in which services for children are being delivered and should help increase system capacity. We know some providers are already benefitting from this.

But I am worried about the growth in single child homes. They can isolate children, be very expensive, and create additional safeguarding risks. They can be right for some children but is not a trend we should uncritically welcome.

Streamlining the application process

The second example is our streamlining the application process for childcare to make it simpler and quicker.

We are simplifying our GP health checks and making sure we have all the evidence we need to make informed decisions. We are also working on changes to the registration process to do more parts in parallel and get to registration visits sooner.

All of this will help childminders and nurseries get registered more quickly.

Inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS)

The third example I want to give is the work we're doing to recognise the experiences of care leavers. We want to capture a child's entire journey through the care system, and especially their experiences when they leave it. From January, our [ILACS inspections will include a new judgement on the](#)

[experiences and progress of care leavers](#).

We've consulted you and the wider sector and received very strong support for this new judgement. We will be publishing the updated framework in December. The criteria will reflect the areas that you and young people who have lived in care think make the most difference to young people's lives.

We will look at young people's relationships and participation; their health, both physical and mental; their learning and employment; and the local offer and support for care leavers as they transition to adulthood.

Area SEND framework

As part of our better regulation priority, I would also like to talk to you about the work we are doing on the new area SEND framework. Thanks to everyone who responded to the [consultation on the framework](#).

This work is a priority for me. I have long had concerns about the significant weaknesses in the system, backed up by the evidence from our inspections and research on the pandemic's impact.

I welcomed the government's vision to reform the system set out in the green paper. But I have always been clear that it would not be right to wait until reforms are made to introduce a new inspection framework. Our aim is to promote improvement in the existing system, while helping areas prepare for further reforms.

Our proposed changes include strengthening the accountability of local area partnerships by having more clarity about who recommendations are aimed at. Critically, we want to put the experiences and outcomes for children with SEND at the centre of our inspections.

Keeping pace with sector changes

As well as making changes at Ofsted, we want to continue to recognise changes and innovations in the sector.

I do understand that you can sometimes feel blamed when things don't work out, and that can hinder innovation.

We understand that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. It's important to try new things to improve outcomes for children. But you should also make sure that when things don't work, you learn from them and improve.

So, we know the sector is changing and it is important not to overburden the system. As changes and reforms become clear, we will continue to be an intelligent regulator.

In my conversations with Ministers, they have always been clear about the importance of changing things carefully and managing change well, while maintaining high ambitions. I couldn't agree more, and I hope that this spirit will continue.

Ofsted will do what it can to bring systems together, recognising a world where not everything is achievable.

We are making sure that we are working with other inspectorates and regulators to hold the right organisations to account. It's a complicated regulatory landscape and we are not the only people who inspect you.

That's why we have been working closely with CQC and HMI Probation so that we don't all inspect at once. We want to give you the space to do what you do well and avoid simultaneous inspections that stretch your resources. This is good for everyone, including your staff, and lets us get to a better reflection of quality.

Keeping children safe

This brings me to the last strategic priority I want to talk about today – 'keeping children safe.'

It is vital through their whole journey – from childhood to adulthood. And there are aspects of safeguarding that have often gone under the radar but are getting more attention.

Supported accommodation

Supported accommodation is currently in the spotlight. We start registering these providers in April. Some of you are already planning and working to be ready for that, and we encourage all of you to do so.

We recognise that supported accommodation is hugely varied – quite rightly, as it should reflect the diverse and changing needs of individual young people.

So, we won't have a one-size-fits-all, overly prescriptive approach.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

We're also seeing more asylum seekers, and particularly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Children who arrive at our shores have often travelled for months and may have endured hardships and harm along the way.

These children need care and compassion, but we also have to be practical and plan for the increased pressures and extra demands.

Unfortunately, many children are getting stuck in unsuitable accommodation such as hotels.

Once in England, children should transfer to the care of a local authority and become a 'child in care.' This should happen swiftly. But we know that growing numbers, pressures on foster care, and the failings of some authorities to take 'their share' has led to unacceptable delays.

We take this very seriously. We have already helped the Chief Inspector of

Borders and Immigration on their inspections of hotels housing these children. Their recent report highlighted safeguarding concerns, very limited education, and unclear or poor oversight.

The Home Office's reply committed them to eliminating the use of such accommodation as quickly as possible. You all have a part to play in achieving that.

It is also vital that asylum seekers are in places which are appropriate for their age. Adults being in spaces for children raise obvious safeguarding concerns. We are also very concerned about increasing numbers of children being found in hotels, mistakenly identified as adults. We have raised this with the DfE and have seen swift action from local authorities. But we are concerned that vulnerable children could be lost from sight and at risk of future exploitation.

We know that many of you are working hard to develop local provision for these very vulnerable children and accommodating the increased quotas. When we inspect, we will recognise those making good efforts as well as where progress is too slow.

Conclusion

I know we all face an extremely challenging landscape. I want to finish by saying that the solutions to the challenges we face do not lie in the gift of any one of us. We must all continue to work on the areas where we can make a difference to improve the outcomes for all children.

Thank you for all the work you are doing in this area and will continue to do.