

Ofsted consults on new approach to Cafcass inspections

Ofsted is seeking views on proposals for a more effective and proportionate approach to inspecting the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass).

Launched today, the [consultation](#) seeks a range of views from those working with children and families in the family courts.

If implemented, the new approach will align Cafcass inspections with Ofsted's other inspections of children's social care. It will maintain a high bar, while introducing more proportionate inspection in response to Cafcass's continued good performance.

The proposed new framework will create a 'whole-system' approach of shorter inspections, with more regular contact in-between. More frequent engagement will help Ofsted to build a better picture of Cafcass's practice.

The proposals in today's consultation include:

- a 3-yearly national judgement inspection
- focused visits between judgement inspections, or inclusion in joint targeted area inspections
- annual sharing of a self-evaluation of frontline practice in both public and private law
- an annual engagement meeting between Ofsted and the Cafcass chief executive and senior leadership team

Three-yearly inspection of the national organisation will continue, but in light of Cafcass's history of positive inspection outcomes, the inspection will be shorter than it is currently. If Cafcass's performance drops below the level of good, Ofsted will have the flexibility to extend the inspection.

At the 3-yearly inspection, Ofsted proposes to make judgements on the quality and effectiveness of Cafcass's private law and public law practice, and on the impact that its leaders have on practice with children and families.

While individual service areas (Cafcass's operational units) will no longer receive a graded judgement, inspectors will feed back to each area on its key strengths and areas for improvement at the end of each visit.

The consultation will close on 11 November and the proposed new framework will take effect from February 2021.

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director for Regulation and Social Care said:

Cafcass has a hugely important role in providing expert social work advice to the family court. I urge anyone working with children and families in the family justice system to give us their views on these proposals.

The family courts can be a frightening and confusing experience, so good-quality, thoughtful work with children and families is vital. Our proposals retain all the rigour of previous inspections but will be more proportionate, with a greater focus on organisational culture and direct work with children and families.