

Written evidence submitted by The Who Cares? Trust

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Who Cares? Trust is the leading national charity for children in care and care leavers in England. We are a voice and a champion for children and young people living in care. We inform and support thousands of children in care and care leavers through our magazines and publications designed specifically for them and we influence improvements in policy and practice by ensuring their views and experiences are heard at the highest level. We also develop innovative, collaborative projects which pilot new ways of working, disseminate best practice and encourage more joined up working across the care system.
- 1.2. Our submission is based on evidence from our direct work with children in care and care leavers. It is particularly informed by consultation sessions we have run with young people in response to Ofsted [consultations](#), since 2011.
- 1.3. We welcome this inquiry by the Education Select Committee, and welcome the opportunity to contribute and to put forward the voices and opinions of looked after children and care leavers.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Ofsted recognises the importance of listening to children and young people, but more needs to be done to hear the views of more looked after children and care leavers when they inspect services.
- 2.2. Ofsted must engage using a wide range of consultation methods, including face to face, by phone and online, with children and young people in order to get views about care from a wide range of children and young people, particularly those who may be placed out of authority or who do not engage with local authority run participation activities.

3. The work of Ofsted across social care

- 3.1. When we speak to young people about their experience with and views on Ofsted, they consistently comment on how Ofsted hears the views of children and young people in care and care leavers. Young people are really keen that someone checks up that the local authority is doing a good job, however looking at case files doesn't give all the answers. Local authorities can look good on paper, but without asking children and young people, it is not possible to know what the effect is on children's lives, unless the children themselves are asked.
- 3.2. Ofsted are eager to hear young people's views in response to their consultations, and we are pleased that they have also engaged with children in care and care leavers by attending projects, events and consultation sessions run by The Who Cares? Trust. We really welcome their willingness to listen and take on board the views of children and young people.
- 3.3. However, the consistent message that young people give us, and that we feedback to Ofsted, is that more needs to be done by inspectors on the ground to engage with children and young people who are in the care of the local authority.
- 3.4. Young people have a number of concerns about how Ofsted speaks to children and young people when they inspect services. These include:
 - 3.4.1. When the local authority is asked to identify young people to speak to inspectors or have their case files inspected, the local authority may choose young people who they know will say positive things or who have had good experiences.
 - 3.4.2. That only choosing a small number of young people to speak to is not sufficient. It [20] is "not even marginally representative."¹
 - 3.4.3. Inspection frameworks sometimes say that inspectors should speak to children 'whenever possible.' Young people feel that "It shouldn't be 'whenever possible', [inspectors] should have to talk to a

¹ Young person at a meeting with Ofsted in September 2012.

certain number of children and young people. They could do calls and emails as well as meeting people. They're forgetting it's about the young people."²

- 3.5. Young people regularly make suggestions about creative and different ways that inspectors can listen to children and young people more, or to ensure that inspectors hear from young people who may be harder for Ofsted to consult with and therefore be missed:
 - 3.5.1. Young people say that Ofsted should ensure that they get a range of young people to speak to; from foster care; from children's homes; different ages; and different cultures, as they say that inspectors won't be able to get a real view of what care is like to everyone if they only speak to one or two children in similar situations.
 - 3.5.2. Inspectors should be flexible and not have to see children and young people during the time period of the inspection, but inspectors could go back and visit if there is a meeting of the Children in Care Council (CICC) a week after the inspection dates, for example. Young people also suggest Ofsted have minimum proportions of children and young people in care and care leavers that Ofsted have to speak to. This should include, but not limited to, inspectors having to see the CICC, having to see a percentage of children and young people living out of authority and a percentage of children and young people from that local authority.
 - 3.5.3. Inspectors should be trained by children and young people themselves about how to speak to them, and how important some issues can be to them. Some children may feel bad about complaining (particularly about carers, as they may not feel it is respectful).
 - 3.5.4. They would like to see Ofsted being more creative in getting views from children and young people. They have suggested using online chats, texts, and drop in sessions at leaving care services. We would like to stress how important it is to engage in different ways, as children who are living in out of authority placements may want to feed in their views but be unable to. Their experience of care and the service they receive from their local authority is likely to be different to children who live within their local authority's boundaries.
 - 3.5.5. Young people should be trained to be peer inspectors to help gather the views of children and young people.
 - 3.5.6. "It should be one [inspector's] job to speak to children and young people, then come together and check it matches with what managers and others have said."³ Having a single inspector responsible for speaking to children and young people would allow Ofsted to speak to more children and young people and engage in more creative ways.
- 3.6. We believe that Ofsted does want to hear the views and voices of children and young people, but that they could do more to hear from more children and young people. Young people we speak to do not feel listened to or engaged with during inspections, even if Ofsted are doing their best to get views from a wide spectrum of children and young people in the care system. We would therefore like to see Ofsted look to be more creative and visible in how they gather the views of those receiving services, as well as doing more to close the feedback loop and give feedback to children and young people after they have inspected their local authority or children's home.

4. The work of Ofsted across education

- 4.1. We do not have much experience of Ofsted's work in education. However, we believe that more needs to be done to inspect how education providers support children in care and care leavers, and how they work with local authorities, in particular how they contribute to looked after children's reviews, support aspirations and how they work with virtual schools.

² Young person at the consultation session run in response to the 'Integrated inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and joint inspection of the local safeguarding children board' in 2014

³ Ibid.