

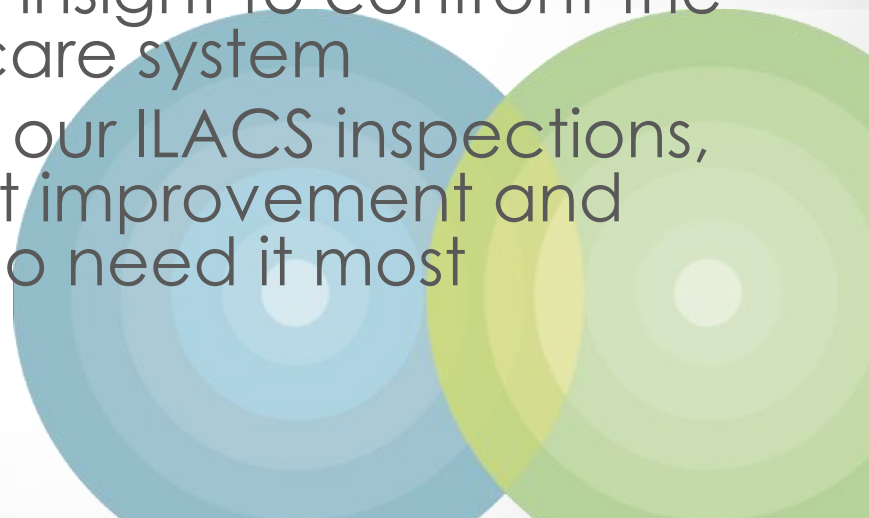


Sector updates

Chris Freestone.
September 2026

Ofsted and inspection changes-overarching:

- adopting a set of 'ambitions' which we will use to guide all policy-making for ILACS and SCCIF
- aligning our frameworks more closely with the goals of the government's reforms
- moving beyond headline judgements towards reporting that reflects the real complexity of children's social care
- improving the ways we seek out the voices of children, young people and families
- using Ofsted's system-wide insight to confront the biggest challenges in the care system
- changing the schedule for our ILACS inspections, so they continue to support improvement and focus on the authorities who need it most



What does this mean ?

- **Report Cards and Grading Scales:** Ofsted launched a consultation in July 2026 to introduce a 5-grade scale and report cards across social care frameworks, replacing old overall scores with more detailed reporting
- **Enduring Relationships:** Proposals include adding a specific judgment focused on children's enduring relationships, aligning with Department for Education (DfE) reforms.



What does this mean ?

- **Provider Regulation:** Changes apply to the Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF) for children's homes, fostering agencies, and supported accommodation to better reflect the true complexity of a child's experience



Challenge

- Alongside its pledge to boost the number of fostering places, the DfE wants to shrink the size of the residential care sector, with MacAlister saying in June 2026 that he wanted it to be used for “far fewer children and only where it best meets their needs”.
- At the same time, he announced a review of the children’s home workforce, to define the skills required of staff and registered managers and recommend improvements to training and qualifications.
- Alongside this, the review, carried out by Emmanuel Akpan-Inwang, founder and director of provider the Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust, has been tasked with defining the purpose of residential care. This led to a warning from provider body the Children’s Home Association (CHA) that the review risked being skewed by the DfE’s drive to shrink the sector.

Challenge

However, in [Keeping Children Safe](#), the Labour government signalled its intent to roll out the model. The [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026](#) includes provisions enabling the government to direct councils to pool the following functions:

- assessing current and future requirements for the accommodation of looked-after children;
 - developing and publishing strategies for meeting those requirements;
 - commissioning the provision of accommodation;
 - recruiting and supporting local authority foster parents;
 - developing, or facilitating the development of, new accommodation for looked-after children;
 - any other functions related to local authority's duties to accommodate looked-after children specified by the government.
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Challenge

The power is due to be enforced from summer 2026.

- Each RCC would be set up under one of three models:
- Constituent councils carrying out the specified functions jointly.
- One council carrying out the functions on behalf of all of the others.
- A separate body being set up to support the councils in carrying out their functions.
- In December 2025, MacAlister said that he intended RCCs to take over the commissioning of care placements nationwide.

Information sharing September 2026

- [Information sharing to safeguard children and young people - GOV.UK](#)
- The duty is In place from 30.9.26
- Who is this for :

Education providers, schools, and
childcare settings

Social workers and health professionals

Voluntary, charity, and private sector
groups working with children

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New guidance

- The guidance is now statutory and reflects the new Information Sharing Duty under section 16LA of the Children Act 2004, which comes into force on 30 September 2026.



New guidance

- The **Information Sharing Duty** removes many of the perceived barriers to information sharing and has enormous implications for how we work together. The duty is a substantial move away from making judgements about child protection thresholds to a general duty (not judgement) to share information about a child and about others connected to a child to support the statutory duties of other agencies.
- *“Information must be shared where it is relevant to safeguarding and promoting a child’s welfare, including where concerns relate to early help, prevention and unmet need... This means when practitioners share information, they can now do so with confidence, even where practitioners may have previously been concerned that statutory or local thresholds were not met.”*

paras 2-3

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New guidance

- The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 deliberately removed old statutory thresholds (like waiting for severe "harm" or a formal child protection enquiry). You must share information without consent when it is relevant.
- **Early Help and Prevention:** Spotting an emerging or unmet need before it escalates.
- **Assessing Overlapping Risks:** Helping another agency build a holistic picture of risk (e.g., if a school notices attendance drops while the police hold exploitation data).
- **Preventing Harm:** When a child or another person connected to them is at perceived risk of harm



New guidance

- While you do not need *permission* to share the data, the 2026 guidance emphasizes **honesty and collaboration** with the family
- **The Rule:** Wherever it is practicable and safe, you should engage with the child or their carers. Explain *what* you intend to share, *why* you are doing it, and *who* you are sending it to. [
- **The Exception:** Do **not** inform the family or ask for consent if doing so would place the child, yourself, or anyone else at an increased or immediate risk of harm



challenge

- Individually, each piece of information might appear limited. Together, they can create a very different picture of risk. Effective information sharing can help professionals identify concerns earlier, understand patterns, make better-informed decisions and coordinate safeguarding responses.
- But sharing information also requires professional judgement. The question should not simply be “*Can I share this?*” Practitioners also need to consider: Why am I sharing it? Who needs it? Is it relevant? Is it proportionate? What could happen if I do not share it?
- Are you confident of the team in this regard ?

challenge

- Information sharing should be necessary, relevant, proportionate, accurate, timely and secure, with practitioners able to explain the reasoning behind significant decisions. Where appropriate, children and families should also understand how their information may be used and shared.
- The key is ensuring staff are confident enough to make defensible decisions rather than allowing uncertainty about information sharing to delay an appropriate safeguarding response.

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challenge

- The guidance aims to allow professionals to build a complete picture of the child
- All too often in the past – as national inquiries show- information has not been shared and harm (sometimes the death of a child) occurs.
- This is a good point to review practice and policy before the end of September implementation

challenge

- We are likely to have a follow-on update to KCSiE and WTTSC





Non-school alternative provision

Aka- unregistered provision

Why?

- Brought in as a response to a largely unregulated and inconsistent range of provisions.
- Some acting as a “shell” for illegal schools
- The standards are intended to inform the local oversight and commissioning of non-school alternative provision; and to set clear and consistent requirements for providers.
- Until the standards become mandatory, the government and DfE encourages local authorities to adopt them voluntarily to support and improve current practice.

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Use

- Commissioners should ensure that the non-school alternative provision they use meets individual needs and re-engages children in education to support regular attendance in school.
- The standards should be aligned with existing QA systems / processes in order for providers to be placed on LA registers



Use

- Schools should also carry out their own QA in order to also satisfy themselves
- Providers could map themselves against the standards in order to align with the LA , school, and the individual needs of the child
- Providers need to make sure that they are not de facto becoming an independent school – this HAS to be registered

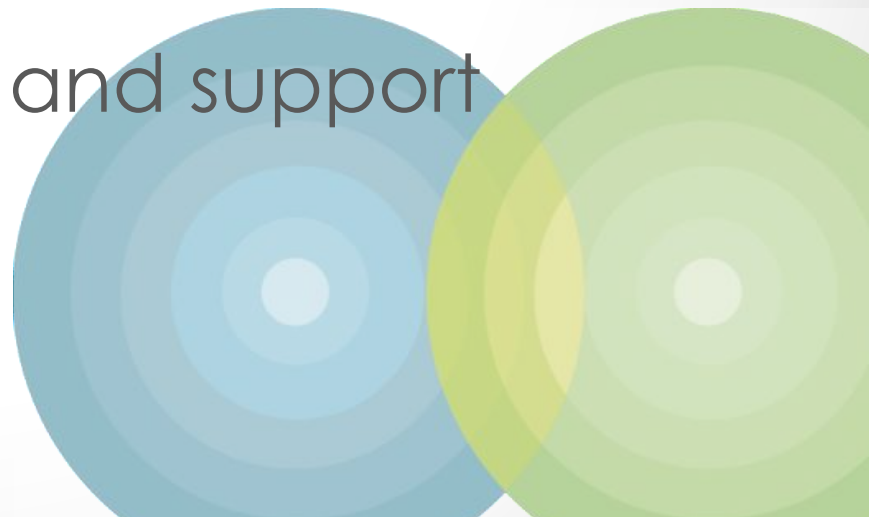


What about Children's provisions ?

- The placing of children with SEND in these provisions can currently be carried out. The DfE is to review this in detail and shape guidance
- Be aware of the themes and what you should be hearing about / involved in

The standards cover four themes:

1. safeguarding and the welfare of children
2. health and safety
3. admissions, guidance and support
4. quality of education



Safeguarding and the welfare of children

- School DSLs will want to ensure they provide key relevant information and any information pertinent to child safeguarding to help understand and meet children's needs and agree arrangements when concerns arise around safeguarding or attendance (schools placing children in non-school AP remain responsible for children at these times – providers should ideally be advising commissioners within 30 minutes if a child is absent). **This should link to your safeguarding and plan for the child**
- Absences should be followed up urgently to ascertain the reason, identify whether the absence is approved or not and where necessary ensure proper safeguarding action is taken. Providers should have agreements in place with commissioners to decide who is best placed to take forward any actions **This should be consistent practice and you should be involved**



Safeguarding and the welfare of children

- Schools using non-school AP remain responsible for safeguarding of their children
- Schools should obtain written confirmation from the provider that appropriate safeguarding checks have been undertaken on people working at the setting (even if the setting is on an LA 'approved list')

Safeguarding and the welfare of children

- A child protection policy (including where to seek help and escalation),
- A behaviour policy (including bullying/cyberbullying/discriminatory bullying and a policy on reasonable force) and
- A staff behaviour policy (low level concerns, allegations and whistleblowing)



What about Children's provision?

- The standards are much more in line with school policies , procedures and processes especially around safer recruitment
- Work closely with the school around admission, transition etc.



What about Children's provision?

- work with children and their parents to help them to understand the purpose of their placement, and to help with the recording and reporting of key information around attendance and behaviour
 - work with commissioners to request and maintain records on the individual needs of each child on admission
 - continue to work with commissioners after admission to regularly assess progression, attendance and behaviour, and act on that information appropriately to support children in meeting their educational and welfare outcomes
 - where appropriate, agree a target with children, their parents and commissioners for re-integration into full time education in a school

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What about Children's provision?

- How will you monitor referral , planning ,transition
- What are your expectations of reporting and recording of progress by the school and provision?
- How will you ensure that your child's voice is heard?
- How will you advocate for the child ?



Sits in a complex framework of other guidance

- Keeping children safe in education
- Working together to safeguard children
- Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions
- Health and safety: responsibilities and duties for schools
- DfE advice on preventing bullying
- First Aid in schools
- Ensuring good behaviour in schools
- Equality Act 2010
- Fire safety in new and existing school buildings
- Fire safety risk assessments in educational premises
- SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years

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continued

- Alternative provision statutory guidance
- Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school
- DfE consultation on strengthening protections in unregistered alternative provision



Sector updates

- Any thoughts or queries?

Thank you- Chris

