

National Thematic Review of Adoption Services

A young people's summary



Hello

This is a review of how well adoption services are working across Wales.

Who we are

We are Care Inspectorate Wales.

We check services that care for children and adults. We make sure services are safe and care for people in the right way.

If services need to improve, we take action.

Why adoption matters

Adoption is when a child becomes part of a new family for life. This usually happens when it's not safe or possible for a child to live with the family they were born into.

Children who are adopted have often been through difficult and upsetting things. They need the right support at the right time. This is why adoption services must work carefully to find the right family and help children feel safe, loved and cared for.

 **Between April and December 2025, we inspected adoption services across Wales.**



How we did the review

We inspected the five **Regional Adoption Collaboratives (RACs)**:

- Adoption Mid and West Wales
- South East Wales Adoption Service
- Western Bay Adoption Service
- North Wales Adoption Service
- The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service



i Regional Adoption Collaborative — a group of councils working together to find safe and loving families for children. They also:

- help people understand adoption
- check people who want to adopt
- work with services to make sure adopted children and families have the right support.



Before the inspections:



We asked each RAC to tell us what they thought was working well and what could improve.



We looked at adoption records and documents.



We observed adoption panels and support groups.

We spoke with:



children and young people who have experience of adoption



birth parents, adoptive parents and foster carers



staff, managers and other professionals.



We used surveys to hear from more people.



We looked at **83** adoption records.



We read **21** children's and families' experiences.

This helped us understand how adoption services are working across Wales.



Overview

The main things that we found.

Adoption services are working well in many ways. But they are not always the same quality across Wales. This means some children and families have a better experience than others.



What's working well

- There are lots of skilled and experienced workers who care about children and put their needs first.
- Workers understand that children may have been through difficult things and support them.
- Staff focus on each child's identity, life story and experiences.
- Services respect children's background, culture and identity.
- Leaders and managers support staff and help them improve.
- Professionals on adoption panels look carefully at plans and make sure things are working well.
- Services respect children's rights.
- Services work carefully with birth families.

i Rights — all children have rights. These are in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – the UNCRC.



What needs to improve

- There are not enough people and families who want to adopt.
- Services could use websites, social media and online information better.
- Families don't always get the right support quickly after adoption.
- Life journey work and life letters are not always completed to the same standard across Wales.
- Some agreements between services and organisations are out of date and need to be clearer.
- Services need to record and check how they keep children safe more clearly.
- Information systems don't always work together. This can make it harder for services to share information.

i Life journey work — helping children understand their life story, their birth family and what happened in their life.



How are children looked after and kept well

This is about how a child is feeling and coping in life. This includes their body, mind, feelings and relationships.

We wanted to know:

- 1** Can people get help from adoption services when they need it?
- 2** Are children kept safe and supported with their wellbeing?
- 3** Do services support each child's identity, culture and language, including Welsh?

What we found ↓

Getting information and asking for help

★ What's working well

- Adoption information is usually easy to find online.
- Adoption services usually reply quickly when people first ask about adoption.
- Information packs are sent within five working days or sooner.
- Some regions have helpful online tools and videos.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Online information isn't the same across Wales.
- People don't always get clear information about support after they adopt.

Children's rights, views and birth families

★ What's working well

- Workers listen to children and include their views in decisions.
- Children and families can get advocacy support.
- Workers try to listen to birth families and treat them with care and respect.
- Birth families often get clear information and support.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Some parts of Wales are better than others and this needs to change.

i Advocacy — support that helps children, young people and families understand their options, have their voices heard and their rights upheld.

😊 Good work!

After a child moved in with their adoptive family, a social worker checked how they were settling in.

They spoke to the adoptive parents. They also spoke to someone independent who knew the family well.

This helped give a fuller picture of the child's experience and how the new home was working for them.

Keeping children safe

★ What's working well

- Staff work hard to keep children safe and support their wellbeing.
- Staff take concerns about a child's safety seriously and talk with managers and other services.
- Workers act quickly when they are worried about a child.

! What needs to improve

- Concerns about safety and what happened next are not recorded and checked in the same way across Wales.
- Some safety checks, including visits that are not arranged in advance, are not always clearly recorded.
- Information is kept in different computer systems, which makes it harder to see patterns or follow things up.

Welsh Early Permanence

★ What's working well

- Adoption services use the National Framework for Welsh Early Permanence.
- Staff are sharing good practice and learning from each other.

! What needs to improve

- Some parts of Wales are better at Welsh Early Permanence than others.
- Workers need more confidence, experience and training for this.

i Early permanence — helping children have fewer moves so they feel settled and have a stable family as quickly as possible.

Identity, culture and Welsh language

★ What's working well

- Services respect children's identity, culture, religion and language.
- When possible, children are matched with adoptive parents who share their background. If it isn't possible, families get support so children stay connected to their culture and identity.
- Services make sure adoption can happen in Welsh.

! What needs to improve

- Some areas don't have enough Welsh-speaking workers.
- Digital resources and information to support this are better in some parts of Wales than others.



Care and support

We wanted to know:

Do children and their birth and adoptive families get the support they need to help them do well and improve their wellbeing?

What we found ↓

Checking people who want to adopt

★ What's working well

- People are checked to make sure they can safely care for a child.
- Workers use the same national way of assessing people.
- Services carefully check that adults can give children the care, patience and support they need.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Assessments are becoming harder and can take longer to complete.
- Sometimes workers have to wait for medical or specialist information. This can slow down decisions.

😊 Good work!

In one example, a child's life story included photographs of their birth family and foster family, and stories written directly to them. This helped the child understand their journey and feel that their story was told with care.

Finding the right family for children

★ What's working well

- Workers support children when they move from foster care to adoption in the right ways.
- Most adoption workers and children's social workers work well together.
- Some services have resources they can use to understand a child's life, relationships and needs.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Finding and moving children to their adoptive family doesn't always happen quickly enough.
- Some children wait too long after the decision has been made.

Support after adoption

★ What's working well

- Many families get good support after adoption. This can include therapy, peer support and help with life story work.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Support after adoption is not the same across Wales.
- Most services have waiting lists for adoption support. People on waiting lists are not always kept updated.
- Support can be harder to provide in some rural areas.

😊 Good work!

"My son had a challenging transition to us ... we were referred to an amazing play therapist; she has kept our family together."

Adoptive parent

Adoption support plans

★ What's working well

- Workers help adoptive families think about safe contact with birth families.
- Some workers are using different ways to help people stay in contact, not just letters.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Adoption support plans aren't always reviewed or updated when needs change.
- Contact arrangements aren't always checked and updated as children grow older.

Checking children's care and support plans

★ What's working well

- Independent Reviewing Officers check how children are doing before Adoption Orders are made.
- Some Independent Reviewing Officers check whether life journey work and later life letters are being completed.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Some parts of Wales are better at this than others.

i Independent Reviewing Officers — people who check that children have the support they need.

i Adoption Orders — the legal decision that makes adoption official and permanent.

i Later life letters — letters written by a child's social worker that explain their early life experiences and the reason for their adoption, to be read when they are older.

Recording a child's life journey

★ What's working well

- There are examples of excellent life journey work.
- Some children have helpful photographs, information and later life letters.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Life journey work and later life letters are not always completed on time or to the same standard. This means not all children get the same help to understand their story.

😊 Good work!

"Adoption services... were able to help support us and give us information that was missing from our child's paperwork."

Adoptive parents

If a placement ends before adoption is final

★ What's working well

- Most adoption placements in Wales are stable. This means placement breakdowns are uncommon. Out of **196** children who were adopted in Wales between April 2024 and March 2025, only **9** placements ended before adoption was completed.
- If a placement ends, services look at what happened so they can learn from mistakes and improve.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Services need to keep learning about what happens when a placement ends.
- There needs to be more information to help workers match a child to a family.

i Placement — when a child moves in with their adoptive family.

Understanding trauma and children's needs

★ What's working well

- Workers try to understand each child's history and emotional needs. They use creative tools to help children understand their life story.
- There is training to help people understand trauma and how early experiences can affect children.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Some adoption services are better than others at understanding children's needs and giving support. This needs to change. All children and families should get careful, trauma-informed support wherever they live.

Listening to children

★ What's working well

- Many reports include children's voices and experiences.
- Some reports are written as if the child is speaking. This can help children understand them when they are older.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Some reports still say a child is too young to have a voice. Even very young children can show what they need through their behaviour, relationships and feelings.

i Trauma-informed — is about understanding that lots of people have been through difficult situations that affect them in different ways.



Adoption panels

★ What's working well

- Adoption panels work well across Wales and focus on children's needs.
- Decisions are usually made at the right time and are based on careful consideration.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Written records don't always show how and why decisions were made.

Finding enough people to adopt

★ What's working well

- All adoption services are trying to find more people to adopt. They are sharing information and running campaigns to encourage more people to come forward.

⚠ What needs to improve

- Wales needs more people who want to adopt.
- We need more people who are willing to adopt brothers and sisters together, or children with more complex needs.
- Services should make it clearer what support is available for people thinking about adopting. This could help more people feel comfortable to apply.



Leadership and how services are run

We wanted to know:

Are leaders making sure adoption services are well run and give people the right support?

What we found ➡



★ What's working well

- Leaders are friendly and supportive. Workers said leaders help them feel valued and well guided.
- Leaders help staff learn, talk openly and think about how to improve.
- Workers in RACs and local authority children's services are skilled, experienced and committed. They put children at the centre of their work.
- Workers understand their safeguarding responsibilities.
- Workers work well with children's social workers.
- Some adoption services check their work, share what's working well and keep learning.
- Services ask children and families about their experiences and use this feedback to improve.

! What needs to improve

- Leadership isn't equally strong across Wales.
- Some services don't have enough staff.
- Some important jobs are funded for short periods of time, which can make services less stable.
- In some areas, children's social workers change often. This can make it harder for children and families to build trust.
- Some information guides and Statements of Purpose are not complete or up to date.
- All services need to check the quality of their work.
- Services need to collect more information about safety concerns and what happened next.
- Data systems don't always work well together and this needs to change.

i Statement of Purpose — official documents that explain how an adoption service works and what people can expect from it.

What happens next

We will keep checking adoption services and how they improve.

We will:

- work with organisations across Wales to make sure the findings from this review help improve how adoption services are planned and run.
- keep checking progress through our usual inspections.

Thanks for reading this

Want to find out more? You can [read the full National Thematic Review of Adoption Services](#) on the Care Inspectorate Wales website.

