Section 7 reports and Cafcass Recommendations

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A Section 7 report makes recommendations, it does not make the final decision in child arrangements orders.

When you are going through child arrangements proceedings, it can feel as though every professional opinion determines your future with your children. A report can carry enormous emotional weight, particularly when you disagree with what it recommends. I had

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involved in my own proceedings and despite them agreeing that the time they spent with the children and I showed the children and "the happiest they had seen them", they made recommendations that contact should not change, but the court did not agree with them. The court increased my contact and made a "joint lives with" order, departing from Cafcass's recommendations. That was my experience, rather than a prediction for anyone else's case. But it illustrates something parents need to understand: the report informs the court's decision, it does not replace it.

> It is well documented across many cases where Cafcass have had their recommendations departed from, if you disagree with a Cafcass report challenge them in court, not directly with evidence.

What is a Section 7 report?

The court may request a

Section 7 report

when it needs a fuller assessment of disputed child welfare issues. A Cafcass Family Court Adviser investigates the matters specified by the court and recommends arrangements they consider appropriate for the child.

> Start by reading the order requesting the report. Understanding what the court has asked to be explored can help you prepare relevant information and keep your

attention on your child's needs.

How are children involved?

The adviser explores the child's wishes, feelings and experiences, usually speaking with them alone. For babies or younger children, observation helps inform the assessment, children are not asked to choose between their parents. The adviser also speaks with the parties and may contact relatives, teachers or health professionals.

> As a parent, give your child space to express themselves. Avoid coaching them or making them feel responsible for the outcome. They already have enough to manage without carrying the pressure of an adult dispute.

What if you disagree?

Read the report carefully, even if your first reaction is frustration or worry. Give yourself time to separate factual errors from conclusions you disagree with. Cafcass says factual inaccuracies, such as incorrect names or dates of birth, should be raised with the adviser or their manager. Concerns about the report's assessment or recommendations should be raised with your solicitor, if represented, and the court.

> Make a clear note of the relevant passage, your concern and any supporting information. A focused explanation is easier to follow than pages of anger, however understandable those feelings may be.

Who makes the decision?

The court decides after considering the report and the other material presented. Your child's wishes matter, but the court may decide that different arrangements serve their best interests, Cafcass cannot provide legal advice. My experience taught me to stay engaged with the process, even when a recommendation was difficult to read. Keep preparing, understand the directions and get independent legal advice where needed.

Sources checked on 12 October 2026:

- Cafcass Section 7 guidance
- Divorcify app overview