School inspections

A guide for parents

This document applies to all maintained schools, including special schools and pupil referral units. It also covers academies, city technology colleges, city colleges for the technology of the arts and some non-maintained special schools in England.

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Why does Ofsted inspect schools?

We inspect schools to provide information to parents, to promote improvement and to hold schools to account for the public money they receive. School inspections are required by law. We provide an independent assessment of the quality and standards of education in schools, and check whether pupils are achieving as much as they can.

Who inspects schools?

Her Majesty's Inspectors and Ofsted Inspectors (who in most cases are serving school leaders who inspect for Ofsted for an agreed number of days each year) carry out the inspections. All inspectors have been trained to, and assessed against, Ofsted's standards.

When do inspections happen and how long do they last?

A school that was judged to be outstanding at its last inspection is exempt from routine inspection. We will not normally inspect exempt schools unless we have a concern about their performance. Ofsted will also carry out an annual assessment of an exempt school's performance (from the third year after the school's last inspection) to determine whether an inspection might be necessary. Exempt schools continue to be inspected as part of Ofsted's programme of surveys of curriculum subjects and aspects of the curriculum. Exemption from inspection does not apply to maintained nursery schools, special schools or pupil referral units.

A school judged to be good at its last inspection normally receives a short inspection (see section on 'short inspections' below).

A school judged as requires improvement at its last inspection is a school that is not yet good but overall provides an acceptable standard of education. The school is inspected again within a period of around two years. Where a school has been judged as requires improvement at two successive inspections, it will be subject to monitoring from inspectors to check its progress and is inspected again within a period of around two years.

A standard inspection usually lasts two days and the number of inspectors on the inspection team will vary according to the size and nature of the school.

What judgements do inspectors make?

Inspectors will make graded judgements on the following areas using the four-point scale:

- Effectiveness of leadership and management
- Quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- Personal development, behaviour and welfare

- Outcomes for pupils.

Where applicable, inspectors will also make a graded judgement on the effectiveness of the early years or sixth form provision in the school.

We give schools an overall grade from 1 to 4:

- grade 1 (outstanding)
- grade 2 (good)
- grade 3 (requires improvement)
- grade 4 (inadequate).

The school must take all reasonable steps to make sure that parents of pupils at the school receive a copy of the report.

What happens if Ofsted judges a school to be inadequate?

If inspectors judge a school to be inadequate, it will be placed in one of the following two categories of concern.

- **Special measures** – This means the school is failing to provide its pupils with an acceptable standard of education, and is not showing the capacity to make the improvements needed.
- **Serious weaknesses** – This means that one or more of the key areas of the school's performance require significant improvement, but leaders and managers have demonstrated the capacity to improve.

A maintained school judged as inadequate and placed in a category of concern will be issued with an academy order by the Secretary of State for Education, to require it to become a new sponsored academy.[1] Inspectors will not normally monitor the school unless there are concerns or there is a delay in the school becoming a sponsored academy.

For an academy that has been judged as inadequate and placed in a category of concern, inspectors will visit the academy to check on its progress until it can be removed from the category (unless it is re-brokered with a new sponsor to become a new sponsored academy). Ofsted will re-inspect an academy that has been judged

[1] Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) judged inadequate will also be issued with an academy order and will be required to become an alternative provision sponsored academy. Maintained nursery schools and non-maintained special schools judged inadequate are not subject to academy orders and will be monitored in the same way as academies that have been judged inadequate (as per the next paragraph).

as having serious weaknesses within 18 months of its last standard two-day inspection, and re-inspect an academy judged to require special measures within two years of its last standard two-day inspection.

Short inspections

A school judged to be good at its last inspection normally receives a one-day short inspection approximately every three years.[2] However, some good schools will automatically receive a full two-day inspection if our risk assessment process indicates that the quality of provision in the school may have deteriorated significantly.

The purpose of a short inspection is to determine whether the school continues to provide a good or better standard of education and whether safeguarding is effective.

If there is sufficient evidence of strong practice and improved performance of a good school, and it is reasonable to believe that the school may be judged outstanding if it received a full two-day inspection, the school will receive a report, in the form of a letter, setting out its strengths and areas of marked improvement and informing the school that its next inspection will be a full two-day inspection, to take place within one to two years.

Similarly, if inspectors are not satisfied that the school would receive its current grade if a full two-day inspection were carried out, the school will receive a report, in the form of a letter, setting out areas for improvement. The letter will make clear that the school's next inspection will be a full two-day inspection, which will take place within two years.

Schools should inform parents of pupils at the school that the report of the short inspection has been published.

How much notice do you give to a school before you inspect?

Most schools receive notice of their inspection on the afternoon of the working day before the inspection begins. However, Ofsted can inspect any school without notice where this is judged to be appropriate.

What happens during an inspection?

Inspectors look at the school's self-evaluation and analyse the pupils' progress and attainment. They talk to the headteacher, governors, staff, and pupils, and consider your views as a parent. They spend most of their time observing a wide range of

[2] This also applies to a maintained nursery school, special school or pupil referral unit judged to be good or outstanding.

lessons and looking at the quality of teaching in the school, and its impact on learning and progress. They also look at the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school, the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; and how well the school is led and managed.

For information about the inspection of boarding or residential provision in schools, please refer to the guidance for schools on being inspected as a boarding or residential school: www.gov.uk/guidance/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-boarding-schools.

How can I make my views known?

If you are the registered parent of a child at the school, the school will send you a letter notifying you of the dates of the inspection. This letter provides you with details and options for providing your views. Our survey site, Parent View, is the main source we use to gather parents' views about a school. Inspectors will use the views expressed on Parent View when inspecting your child's school.

Can I speak to the inspectors?

You may have the chance to speak to the inspectors during the inspection, for example at the start of the school day. The inspection administrators will be happy to pass on messages to the inspectors and may be able to arrange telephone conversations if you are unable to speak to them in person. Their contact details will be in the letter that tells you about the inspection. Please remember that inspectors cannot deal with complaints concerning individual pupils or settle disputes between you and the school.

What happens after the inspection?

The lead inspector reports her or his judgement to the headteacher and governors. The inspectors' findings are published in a report for the school, parents and the wider community. Inspection reports provide information about the effectiveness of the school's work and contain recommendations about what the school should do to improve further. Reports are published on our website: http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Where can further details be found about school inspections?

The 'Common inspection framework: education, skills and early years'[3] sets out the principles that apply to inspection and the main judgements that inspectors make when conducting inspections.

The 'School inspection handbook'[4] and 'School inspection handbook – section 8'[5] set out the statutory basis for inspections, what schools can expect at inspections and provide guidance for inspectors on making their judgements.

What happens if I have concerns about the inspection?

Complaints are rare, but we treat them very seriously. You can find out more on our website at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure, or by calling our helpline on 0300 123 4666.

If you need any more information about our work, please visit our website or call our helpline.

What happens if I have concerns about my child's school?

If you are concerned about your child's school, you should start by talking directly to the teachers or headteacher or, if necessary, the governing body or the local authority. If you are not satisfied with the responses you receive Ofsted may be able to help.

You can find out more on our website or by calling our helpline.
Helpline: 0300 123 4666
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

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[3] 'Common inspection framework', Ofsted, August 2015; www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015.

[4] 'School inspection handbook', Ofsted, January 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015.

[5] 'School inspection handbook – section 8', Ofsted, January 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-short-monitoring-and-unannounced-behaviour-school-inspections.

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