

Monitoring visits and support for schools that require improvement in order to become good or outstanding

This guidance sets out Ofsted's approach to supporting and challenging schools that are judged to require improvement at a section 5 inspection. It outlines the main activities that may be undertaken from the time that the school is judged to require improvement until it is reinspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. This guidance takes effect from 1 November 2012.

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Introduction

1. This guidance explains how Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) will monitor and support schools that were judged to require improvement at their most recent section 5 inspection. Schools that require improvement in order to become good or outstanding are not 'schools causing concern', as set out in the Education Act 2005. Nonetheless, Ofsted is committed to monitoring and supporting these schools until they are judged to be good or outstanding.
2. Schools judged to require improvement will receive an initial monitoring inspection visit usually within four to six weeks of the publication of the section 5 inspection report. This visit will be carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 by an HMI. Where leadership and management were judged to be good at the recent section 5 inspection, the school will not normally receive such a visit.
3. Following the initial monitoring visit, the HMI will recommend whether or not further monitoring visits and/or other activity should occur to encourage the school's improvement so that the school is judged good or outstanding at its next section 5 inspection. Where an HMI is of the opinion that a school is ready for inspection, they may recommend that the next section 5 inspection be brought forward.

Focus of the monitoring visit

4. The initial monitoring visit will focus on:
 - reviewing with the school the progress it is making in ensuring that the key areas for improvement identified at the most recent section 5 inspection are being addressed effectively and with sufficient urgency
 - examining with leaders and managers (including by meeting with the governing body and other responsible authorities) whether the fundamental actions needed to improve the school – for example, in relation to the quality of teaching, management of performance, and governance – are being taken (pupils are unlikely to be well served by a school that has focused on peripheral matters rather than on the core issues that need tackling before the school can be good or outstanding)
 - identifying with leaders and managers (including by meeting with the governing body and other responsible authorities) any other possible barriers to the implementation of the action plan and progress towards becoming a good or outstanding school
 - reviewing the impact of external support with leaders and managers, and examining whether this support is being deployed and delivered in the most effective manner to secure school improvement
 - determining the nature and timing of further activity by HMI to support improvement (see annex A)

- following any further activity, recommending whether or not the school is ready for a section 5 inspection.
5. All monitoring visits are carried out in accordance with the code of conduct for inspectors as set out in *The framework for school inspection*.¹ However, this monitoring visit is not subject to the same procedures as a section 5 inspection and HMI will adjust the way they work to reflect the circumstances of the school.
 6. Schools judged to require improvement are not required to prepare a separate action plan but are expected to amend their existing plans to address the areas for improvement identified by the section 5 inspection.
 7. All schools requiring improvement will be reinspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 no later than 24 months after the inspection at which the school was judged to require improvement.
 8. Further general guidance, briefing papers on school inspections and other materials are available on Ofsted's [website](#).

Conducting the monitoring visit

9. The HMI will not normally be accompanied by another inspector on the initial visit.
10. Where a school that requires improvement has residential or boarding provision, the lead inspector should inform the Managing Inspector, Operational Lead for the Welfare Inspection of Boarding Schools² (autumn term only).

Notification

11. The HMI will telephone the school up to five days before the start of the visit to ensure that members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority or other appropriate authority are available when the visit takes place.
12. If the headteacher is unavailable, the HMI should ask to speak to the next most senior member of staff, ensuring that the headteacher will be in school on the day of the inspection. Once the inspection has been confirmed, the HMI will inform the inspection service provider (ISP), who will send formal confirmation of the visit to the school by email. During the initial telephone call the HMI will:

¹ *The framework for school inspection from September 2012*, Ofsted, 2012;

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/framework-for-school-inspection-september-2012-0>.

² Further guidance for education and social care inspectors on conducting integrated monitoring inspections is available in *Conducting additional inspections of independent schools* (090060), Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090060.

- confirm the date of the visit
- make sure that the headteacher will be present on the day of the visit, understands the purpose of the visit and has the opportunity to discuss any specific focus
- confirm that the school is able to inform the governing body and the local authority/proprietor/sponsor and that the HMI will wish to speak to them during the visit or, where necessary, that the HMI will make alternative arrangements to speak with them
- explain that the visit is carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005.

13. **Requests for a deferral** will be handled in accordance with Ofsted's policy about the deferral of inspections.³

Monitoring visit activities

14. The HMI will arrive at the school on the day of the visit at the time agreed during the initial telephone conversation.
15. On arrival at the school the lead inspector must show their identity badge and ask to see the headteacher. The headteacher should be advised that they may phone the National Business Unit (telephone: 0300 123 4234) to check on the identity of the lead inspector if they wish to do so.
16. During the initial visit the HMI will usually:
- meet with the headteacher/deputy headteacher or other senior leaders – this meeting should establish a working relationship and focus on the actions taken so far to tackle the reasons why the school is not yet good, critically evaluating the quality of improvement planning, the progress made in implementing the plan and the expected impact of the actions taken
 - conduct separate meetings with representatives of the local authority/proprietor/sponsor; and the Chair and members of the governing body, to establish what progress has been made, including progress with any review of governance
 - undertake other activities as may be required to gather evidence about, for example, the quality of the leadership of teaching, including records of teacher performance, planning and assessment, observations, work scrutiny and minutes of governing body meetings
 - ask the school to encourage parents and carers to use Parent View to contribute/record their views about the school's progress.
 - meet with pupils where possible

³ *Deferral of inspections: information for schools*, Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/deferral-of-inspections-information-for-schools.

- plan time to reflect, draft the monitoring letter and consider what, if any, further challenge or support is required
 - discuss with the headteacher the next steps, including any possible further monitoring visits or other improvement activity
 - conduct a final feedback meeting with key stakeholders, including as many governors as possible.
17. Where a further monitoring visit is considered necessary, this will take place after a suitable interval and in advance of the next section 5 inspection.
18. Where concerns about the school, its leadership and management or its governance are identified by HMI during a visit or subsequently, these will be identified clearly and specific recommendations relating to these concerns will be made by HMI.
19. Where a visit identifies serious concerns about aspects of the school's performance, including the safeguarding of pupils, that were not identified in the previous section 5 inspection or in any earlier monitoring visits, these must be considered by the HMI and reported to the school. Such serious concerns could also lead to the next section 5 inspection being brought forward.

Reporting on the monitoring visit

20. The content of the letter written at the end of the visit will include:
- the date of the visit and whether it was a first, or subsequent, visit
 - the evidence gathered during the visit
 - the context of the school
 - the impact of the work being done to improve the school and the progress being made since the recent inspection, making specific reference to the effectiveness of governors in holding the school to account and/or progress with any review of governance
 - the suitability of the school's plans to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent inspection and any recommendations by the HMI
 - the quality and impact of any external support.
21. The arrangements for writing the monitoring visit letter are as follows.
- The HMI will complete the brief letter towards the end of the monitoring visit day. This will be sent to the appropriate inspection service provider (ISP) within three days of the monitoring visit taking place.
 - The lead inspector is responsible for the quality and accuracy of the letter.
 - Within 10 days of the end of the visit, the ISP will prepare the final version of the letter reporting on the visit for publication, which will be submitted to

Ofsted through the data exchange and sent to the headteacher and copied (as appropriate) to:

- the appropriate authority (e.g. Chair of the governing body/interim executive board)
 - the local authority
 - the academy chain where relevant
 - the diocese (for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools)
 - the Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
 - the person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
 - the lead inspector.
22. Completed letters should be sent as one document and given the following file name: D school name, visit number (1 = first visit, 2= second...) RI (that is, D school name 2 RI) and emailed to the ISP within three working days of the end of the inspection.
23. Ofsted will publish this letter on its website within 15 days of the visit.

Inspection evidence

24. Lead inspectors may retain copies of inspection evidence until the school is reinspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, but must do so in line with Ofsted's information assurance policy and procedures.
25. Inspection evidence gathered during a monitoring visit will not normally be used as part of the evidence for the subsequent section 5 inspection. However, where a section 5 inspection is carried out because of serious concerns raised during a visit about the quality of education provided, inspectors may use the evidence gathered during the visit. In such a case, the extent of any use will be made clear to those responsible for leading and managing the school.

Evaluation of the arrangements (autumn term only)

26. During the autumn term 2012, senior HMI will make contact with the headteacher/governing body and/or other appropriate authority in a sample of those schools visited in the autumn term. The purpose of the contact is to ascertain their views about the impact of these visits in promoting improvement. This feedback will be taken account of in any revision to this guidance.

Annex A. Strategies for further challenge and support

Ofsted's general duty to promote improvement

1. Ofsted has a range of duties under s117 (1) Education and Inspections Act 2006. One of these is to perform its functions for the general purpose of encouraging improvement in the services it inspects and regulates. Inspection and regulation are the principal way of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the quality of provision and bringing about improvement for Ofsted. However, additional monitoring and support are being introduced for those schools that are not yet good.
2. HMI will visit those schools that require improvement, where leadership and management are not yet good or outstanding, to provide support and challenge in making the progress necessary to be judged good or outstanding at their next section 5 inspection.
3. The arrangements for the monitoring visits are set out in the above guidance. A key element of the visits, and any subsequent visits, is the careful consideration of what further improvement activity should take place to support the school, including improvement activity led by HMI.
4. For the academic year 2012/13, any further improvement activity after the initial visit will usually take place only from 1 January 2013.

Considering what further improvement activity will take place

5. During the initial and any subsequent visit, the HMI will consider what further actions are needed to ensure that the school makes the progress necessary for it to be judged good or outstanding at its next section 5 inspection. In doing so, the HMI will consider also the extent and nature of any further HMI challenge and support. In some circumstances, for example, where the HMI and the school are of the opinion that the school would benefit from substantial activity, the HMI will discuss next steps and further actions with senior managers at Ofsted before confirming these to the school.

Strategies for support and challenge to schools

6. The following is an indicative range of challenge and support strategies that HMI may choose to employ and/or recommend when visiting a school or subsequently. The strategies are not mutually exclusive and the list is not exhaustive. HMI may recommend other activities that suit the specific circumstances of the school. HMI will be expected to use their time and available resources when supporting and challenging schools in a flexible way, within the overall available time, to support the school in improving the quality of education it provides before the next section 5 inspection.

7. Following the initial monitoring visit, and taking account of the local circumstances of the school and the support that may be in place or available, the HMI may recommend one or more of the following:
- an invitation to school leaders to attend an Ofsted improvement seminar covering the range of common weaknesses as identified through inspection evidence; this is likely to include improving the quality of teaching, performance management, governance, and assessment and planning to meet the needs of all pupils
 - the HMI attending a governors' meeting to explain, using Ofsted evidence, how governors can assist in ensuring that a school moves from requires improvement to good
 - a meeting with local and other relevant authorities to discuss progress being made towards becoming a good school
 - establishing stronger links with other local schools to learn from their strengths, as well as to work together on shared issues.
 - the HMI offering to arrange a visit for senior leaders and governors to another school
 - establishing links with the National College, for example to access support for the leadership of teaching, improving and/or reviewing governance and developing middle leaders and managers
 - accessing existing local and regional networks and support such as National Leaders of Education, Local Leaders of Education and Specialist Leaders of Education
 - school leaders attending a specific subject or aspect best practice seminar led by HMI, drawing on Ofsted evidence, such as on improving teaching and outcomes for pupils in mathematics and/or English
 - a further one-day monitoring visit by the HMI with a specific focus
 - a short visit to the school by the HMI to meet with the headteacher to check on progress
 - a meeting between the HMI with other staff, or groups of staff, in the school to review progress against agreed action plans and/or to share good practice
 - the HMI meeting with middle leaders and managers in the school to discuss how teaching can be strengthened
 - joint observation of a particular subject or aspect by the HMI and senior/middle leaders
 - a short visit to the school by the HMI to assess levels of pupils' progress by carrying out scrutiny of pupils' work
 - arranging a subject inspection visit.

8. Not all these activities will require a full day visit to a school and some may need to take place after the end of the school day or in the evening. In some circumstances, the HMI may agree to contact the school by telephone to discuss progress against a particular recommendation or to enquire as to the progress being made overall. Where a full day monitoring visit does not take place, the HMI will not normally report their findings in a monitoring letter but will prepare a briefing for a senior HMI and/or relevant regional director as required.⁴
9. All schools have a responsibility for ensuring that they provide a good quality of education for their pupils. The headteacher, other senior leaders, the governing body and other appropriate authorities, must determine the exact actions to take to improve the school and how to access any necessary support. However, the HMI will support the school in this process.
10. The HMI will ensure that the school understands how to access external support locally and that suitable coordinating arrangements for support are in place. Where the school is not drawing appropriately on external support and/or this is not securing improvement in pupil progress, the HMI will report on this to the school and discuss ways in which this might be improved.
11. Where required, the HMI will raise concerns about the progress of a school or concerns about the impact of the support being provided with the local authority, governing body or other appropriate authority responsible for the school.
12. Senior HMI from Ofsted will liaise regularly with the National College of School Leadership, local authorities and other appropriate authorities to discuss ways in which greater improvement can be secured for schools or groups of schools.

Evaluation of these arrangements (spring term only)

13. During the spring term 2013, senior HMI will make contact with the headteacher/governing body and/or other appropriate authority in a sample of those schools visited in the autumn term. The purpose of the contact is to ascertain their views about the impact of this further activity in promoting improvement. This feedback will be taken account of in any revision to this guidance.

⁴ In these circumstances, the monitoring activity will not take place under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005.