

Maintained schools and academies: inspections and outcomes

Methodology and quality report

Last updated:

4 March 2016

Introduction

This paper contains methodology and quality information relevant to Ofsted's release of maintained schools and academies inspections and outcomes data, which is published three times per year. This release can be found at the following webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes-official-statistics>.

This official statistics release reports on the outcomes of maintained school¹ inspections that were conducted within the most recent reporting period. This release also includes the most recent inspection outcomes for all schools that are open and have been inspected, as at the end of the period. This report covers outcomes for all maintained schools and academies within England.

This methodology and quality report should be read in conjunction with the background notes contained within the statistical first release, as those notes will include helpful information that is not in this report.

Methodology

Data in this official statistics series are from inspections conducted under sections 5 and 8 of the Education Act 2005. Further detail on the dates of inspections included can be found within the release. If an inspection report is not published by the cut-off date given in the release then the previous inspection will be reported as a school's most recent inspection where applicable. Data will be presented and analysed in two ways:

- Inspections that have occurred within the academic year being reported where published by the given date.
- The most recent inspection outcome of open schools as at the end of the reporting period.

Both official statistics and Ofsted's monthly management information on school inspection outcomes have a time delay between the end of the reporting period and the publication cut-off date; monthly management information has a shorter delay.

¹ Please see the glossary for a definition of maintained schools

As the official statistics report key findings, we need to ensure that most of the reports of inspections undertaken within the reporting period have been published in order to minimise bias. For instance, the inspection reports of those schools judged inadequate undergo additional moderation checks. However, the management information does not report key findings and simply reports on the most up-to-date information possible.

Under exceptional circumstances Ofsted may withhold/withdraw publication of an inspection report. Outcomes of withheld/withdrawn inspection reports are not included in any of the datasets. These are highlighted with footnotes throughout the report.

Warning notice data are included in the school level data for any maintained school receiving a [warning notice from a local authority](#)² and for any academy receiving a [warning notice from the Secretary of State for Education](#)³.

Where statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have declined or improved, they are referring to the most recent overall effectiveness outcomes compared to those of the most recent previous inspection only.

Data in this release are also used to update Ofsted's [DataView tool](#)⁴.

Schools are included within most recent inspection outcomes if they were open on the final day of the reporting period, or if they closed on that day and they have been inspected.

Phases of education

Ofsted reports on various phases of education which include different types of establishment:

- Nursery schools include local authority maintained nursery schools and miscellaneous nursery schools.
- Primary schools include converter academies, sponsor-led academies, free schools and local authority maintained primary schools. These include some middle schools which have been deemed to be primary schools because the majority of pupils are primary-age children.

² For further details, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-causing-concern--2>

³ For further details, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-letters-to-academy-trusts-about-poor-performance>

⁴ See <http://dataview.ofsted.gov.uk/>

- Secondary schools include converter academies, sponsor-led academies, free schools, studio schools, city technology colleges, university technical colleges and local authority maintained secondary schools. These include some middle schools which have been deemed to be secondary schools because the majority of pupils are secondary-age children. This category also includes all-through schools.
- Special schools include converter academies, sponsor-led academies and local authority maintained special schools. It also includes non-maintained special schools inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.
- Pupil referral units include alternative provision academies (both converter and sponsor-led) and local authority maintained pupil referral units.

Early years provision that is governed by state funded and independent schools may require separate registration with Ofsted. Where this provision is not on the Early Years Register it will be inspected as part of the section 5 inspection and outcomes are included in the release. Early years registered provision will be subject to an Ofsted early years inspection and included in the Early Years release. For information on registered early year provision inspections please refer to the official statistics for early years and childcare at www.gov.uk/government/collections/early-years-and-childcare-statistics.

The welfare provision for boarding and residential special schools is inspected at the same time as the section 5 inspection, where possible. Inspections of this type are referred to as integrated inspections. Documents relating to the inspection of boarding and residential provision in schools can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-boarding-and-residential-provision-in-schools.

Issues affecting comparability

The proportion of good schools that are inspected each year is smaller than the proportion of all good schools nationally. In addition, primary and secondary schools judged outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent previous inspection are exempt from further routine inspection. More information about this can be found within the coherence and comparability section of the quality report below.

Changes in inspection framework and policy over time may impact upon these statistics. These include policies related to schools becoming academies. Further information on this can be found within the comparability section of the quality report below.

Recent changes

Ofsted has launched far-reaching changes to the way it inspects early years provision, schools and further education and skills. These changes came into effect in September 2015 and include the introduction of a common inspection framework for all early years settings on the Early Years Register, maintained schools and academies, non-association independent schools and further education and skills providers. The common inspection framework can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015

Revisions

Revisions are published in line with Ofsted's revisions policy for official statistics. For more information about the policy please visit the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics.

Quality

Relevance

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted official statistics are released to inform government and the public about the quality of schools in England, provide an evidence base for policy making and to promote improvement across the school sector.

Maintained schools and academies are inspected in accordance with sections 5 or 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) which can be found here: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents. The inspection framework was revised on 1 September 2012 and this framework was implemented until 31 August 2015. Under this framework, schools are judged as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate (either having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures). This version of the framework can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-framework-for-school-inspection. A new version of the framework was launched on 1 September 2015.

These official statistics are the aggregates of judgements made on individual school inspections. By aggregating the judgements made and showing these as proportions of the total number of inspections, we can identify messages from the data. We analyse the data in different ways, for example by region or by phase of school, to identify important differences, patterns and trends. The official statistics release

draws out the key messages and communicates these in an understandable way, which is appropriate for a wide range of different users. Users are able to interpret and manipulate the data published for their own purposes. The users of these official statistics include the Department for Education (DfE), local authorities, multi-academy trusts, academics and the third sector.

More specifically, information found within this release is used in a variety of ways.

- Media outlets use the key findings from our statistical release to inform the public about the quality of schools across the country and in particular local areas.
- These data allow users to track movement in the education sector and monitor the quality of provision available at a national and local level and across provider types.
- This accurate picture of the provision influences policy decisions about the location and quality of school provision.
- These data allow the identification of areas of weak performance. This informs policy development within DfE, local authorities and multi-academy trusts to address issues and implement strategies to mitigate them.
- Within Ofsted, inspection profiles inform inspection framework development and underpin policies to improve standards. The key messages within the official statistics contribute towards the findings in Ofsted's annual report to parliament.

The data included in the release are generated by Ofsted's regulation and inspection process and are therefore administrative data.

Meeting user needs

In August 2015, we published the results of a consultation on this official statistics release. Documentation relating to this consultation, which includes a list of resulting changes, can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/publication-of-statistics-on-maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes.

Ofsted welcomes feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the Schools Data and Analysis team at inspectioninsight@ofsted.gov.uk.

Coherence and comparability

The tables and charts within the release compare inspection outcomes over the past several years. There have been a number of framework changes since the first release of statistics and these have been reflected in the publications. The overall effectiveness grade has remained comparable across the different frameworks. Other sub judgements are, if possible, mapped across frameworks when changes occur. This is explained in more detail in the 'frameworks' section below.

When these changes have occurred, users have been alerted via updates in the official statistics introduction and methodology sections of the key findings document. When changes to inspection frameworks or methodological changes have been implemented to improve the output, guidance has been added to footnotes and the key findings document for easy access.

Inspection outcomes data presented in provisional official statistics releases will match the data shown in Dataview. Where inspection reports are published after the final publication date included within a release, the inspection outcomes will be reflected within the next provisional official statistics release.

There are no comparable data published by other producers of official or national statistics for school inspections in England.

In Scotland, inspections are carried out by Education Scotland and can be found at: <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/index.asp>

In Wales, inspections are carried out by Estyn and can be found at: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/>

In Northern Ireland, inspections are carried out by Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and can be found at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/>

Ofsted also produces regular management information on the outcomes of school inspections. There are some small differences in methodology regarding how schools that have recently closed are treated. In the official statistics, schools are included if they were open on the final date specified on the official statistics release, or if they closed on this date. In the management information, schools are excluded if they had closed by the date that the list of open schools is extracted from Edubase, even if they were open on the final day of the previous month. This list of schools is obtained from Edubase in the first few working days of the month, however, which means that the difference between the two datasets is usually quite small. In addition, there are differences between the length of time between the end of the

reporting and publication cut-off date used for official statistics and management information. This difference is outlined in the methodology section.

Several third parties provide interactive tools displaying publicly available Ofsted inspection judgements. These appear to be collated by using advanced computer techniques to harvest information from published inspection reports. Ofsted cannot comment on the quality of these datasets.

Changes that affect how comparable data are across time:

The selection process

- Not all schools are inspected with equal regularity. Ofsted must inspect all schools to which section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) applies within prescribed intervals. However, Ofsted takes a proportionate approach to inspection.
- The result of this is that the schools inspected in a particular academic year are very unlikely to be representative of schools as a whole. This may also affect the comparability of school inspection outcomes between years. This is as a result of the following:
 - Schools that were previously judged to be less than good in their most recent inspection are inspected more frequently than good schools.
 - Good schools are subject to a risk assessment in order to identify whether there are concerns that standards in the school may have declined. The overall effectiveness grade of these schools is therefore more likely to decline. In this instance, the inspection of the school may occur earlier than the maximum permitted interval.
 - Certain types of school previously judged to be outstanding in their most recent inspection, are exempt from inspection under regulations and will not be inspected unless Ofsted has concerns about them, for example; concerns identified through risk assessment, a complaint, a serious safeguarding incident or concerns are raised about the standards of leadership and management. Outstanding special schools, nursery schools and pupil referral units are not exempt from inspection.

More information about the selection of schools is found in the 'frequency of inspection' section of the glossary.

Integrated inspections

Where a maintained school or academy offers residential boarding, Ofsted aims to inspect both the education and boarding provision during the same inspection. These are known as integrated inspections. Outcomes for these integrated inspections were previously included in table 2.

Frameworks

As noted above, framework changes have had an impact on what we can report on in a consistent way. Consideration of how judgements change means that between frameworks there may be breaks or changes in the way we report certain judgements.

Historical inspection frameworks and a list of changes to these can be found on the national archives at:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/maintained-schools-inspection-documents-archive>.

Guidance on the framework and handbook for inspectors used for inspections up until August 2015 can be found at: <http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-framework-for-school-inspection>

and www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook.

These framework changes have the following impact on current reporting:

- Overall effectiveness: This judgement is reported consistently across all frameworks from September 2005 to the current framework.
- Effectiveness of the sixth form: This judgement is reported consistently across all frameworks from September 2005 to the current framework, with the exception of 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years when, due to legislation changes, the judgement was not reported.
- Effectiveness of the early years: This judgement is reported consistently across all frameworks from September 2005 to the current framework, with the exception of 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years when, due to legislation changes, the judgement was not reported.
- Achievement of pupils at the school:

The 'How well do learners achieve?' judgement was reported from Sept 2005 until 1 September 2009. A new judgement, 'Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning' was introduced in September 2009. This judgement was considered different enough to be reported separately. A

further new judgement was introduced on 1st January 2012, 'Achievement of pupils at the school'. This judgement is consistent with judgements back to 1 September 2009 and is therefore combined within the data. It should be noted that achievement judgements have been aggregated in some tables that report the most recent inspection outcome of schools.

- Behaviour and safety of pupils at the school: This judgement was introduced on 1 January 2012 and while it incorporates the safety of pupils into the judgement, it was still considered consistent with 'Pupils behaviour' and 'Behaviour of learners' from previous frameworks from between September 2005 and January 2012.
- The quality of teaching in the school: This judgement is reported consistently across all frameworks from September 2005 to the current framework.
- The quality of leadership and management of the school: This judgement is reported consistently across all frameworks from September 2005 to the current framework.

Policy changes

Some policies within Ofsted and the DfE impact on the comparability of different school types to each other and to schools as a whole. Comparisons between school types should be treated with caution due to the different inspection frameworks used over the past five years and the variation in the number of schools included in the different categories.

- Converter Academies (including special converters and alternative provision converters)

When a local authority maintained school converts to become an academy it keeps the inspection history from its predecessor school. For example, a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness that converted to an academy would retain its outstanding grade until it was inspected as an academy. Reporting of converter academies therefore includes some judgements where the school was inspected as an academy, and some where the most recent inspection was of the predecessor school. It is important to recognise that the academy and the predecessor school are different legal entities.

- Sponsor-led academies (including special sponsor-led academies and alternative provision sponsor-led academies)

Maintained schools may close to re-open as sponsor-led academies. Such schools are more likely to be schools that were judged to require improvement or to be inadequate at their most recent inspection. The new academy does not retain the inspection history of the maintained school and is not included in Ofsted's statistics until it is inspected as an academy. In addition, a large number of sponsor-led academies have not yet been inspected and inspection outcomes therefore reflect only those sponsor-led academies that have. Therefore, users should be cautious when drawing conclusions about the performance of all open sponsor-led academies based on the sub-set with inspection outcomes.

Occasionally schools not inspected under section 5 may become academies. Independent schools sometimes do this. In this case, the previous school closes and re-opens as a new sponsor-led academy and the inspection history of the previous school is not included in Ofsted statistics.

- Free schools

Most free schools that are opened are new schools. Therefore, no previous school has closed. We have not inspected all free schools that have opened. Therefore, caution needs to be exercised when using data as it only represents those free schools that have been inspected. As with sponsor-led academies, the number of free schools that have opened is comparatively small when compared with other types of school. Therefore, caution should be exercised when comparing free schools with other types of schools.

- Inspections in-year

As stated earlier, the outcomes of schools inspected in the academic year is very unlikely to be representative of schools as a whole, as Ofsted adopts an approach to inspection which is proportionate to risk. However, new schools are usually inspected according to a fixed cycle, in the majority of cases the timing of this inspection is not determined by performance data of the school. The result is that there may be differences in the inspection outcomes within the year, between schools that have previously been inspected and new schools. Users will need to take this into account when comparing the outcomes of different types of schools. At present, inspections of new free schools and sponsor-led academies account for a larger proportion of all inspections of these types of schools than is the case for academy converters and local authority maintained schools.

Accuracy and reliability

This release reports on (1) the most recent inspection grade of all open schools and (2) inspections that have taken place during the academic year. A cut-off date for the publication of the reports included is given. Schools that have yet to be inspected are not included. If an inspection report has been published but subsequently withheld then this will not be included in inspection outcomes. Footnotes will advise where this is the case. Where the inspection report is published after the cut-off date given for the release, the inspection judgement will not be included. These will appear in later releases, after they have been published.

Ofsted undertakes moderation of all inspection reports where a school is judged to be inadequate. This may result in some inspections being published after the publication cut-off date required for inclusion within the provisional release. Therefore, provisional statistics are likely to under-represent schools being placed in a category of concern. In addition, where there are concerns that further evidence may be required to secure the inspection evidence base, this will delay publication of an inspection report. Further details of these procedures can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/flawed-inspections-ofsted-related-protocol.

Inspection outcomes data are extracted from Ofsted's administrative systems. Errors in recording inspection outcomes may affect the quality of the source data. Until April 2015, a document scanner was therefore used by Ofsted as a means of validating the outcomes entered into our systems of inspections undertaken under section 5 of the Education Act. Technical production of the publications may also result in manual errors. A rigorous data quality assurance procedure is adopted with the aim of minimising the risk of reporting error. If an error is discovered within the document, then a note is placed on the website and a corrected version of the document uploaded as soon as possible.

Data indicating whether schools are opened or closed and their type and phase of education is obtained from Edubase. The quality of data relating to school opening and closures is considered to be good. Changes that occur as a result of schools converting to academy status, or closing to become sponsor-led academies are managed centrally by the DfE's Academies Operations and Strategies team. The process for changes undergoes monthly reconciliation checks against other data systems within the DfE. Some issues have been identified around the closure, merger and amalgamation of local authority maintained schools. Local authorities do not always inform the DfE of these changes, and therefore these are sometimes identified after the event. These discrepancies are usually picked up as part of checks built into other processes.

Data obtained from Edubase on the type of education is also considered to be of good quality. Any change to the type of education requires verification from the DfE. The phase of education is not subject to the same verification, local authority maintained schools have some remit to change their age range through a local process. Errors are picked up as part of the DfE's performance table validation process but this may be after the event. The DfE has recently introduced a requirement for schools to update their Edubase record every 90 days.

This release does not include the inspection outcomes of independent schools, further education and skills providers and providers of early years provision. These are included in separate releases. Further details of these can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/statistics.

More information of the issues relating to the use of administrative data is available here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics.

Timeliness and punctuality

Data are currently published three times a year and include details of inspections that have taken place and been published in the relevant period. To ensure data are as timely as possible, each release includes the most recent possible full month of inspections .

Data are published at 09:30 on the date pre-announced in the publication schedule: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/statistics. Information on any delay in publication can also be found on the publication schedule.

We allow approximately five weeks after the end of the reporting period as the cut-off date for the inclusion of published inspection reports. This is to allow time for the publication of the majority of inspections that have taken place within the reporting period. The average production time for this release is approximately six weeks. This time includes obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and uploading the information onto the gov.uk website.

Publications are announced via social media. Pre-release access is given in accordance with the pre-release to official statistics order (2008). Details of this order can be found at: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/legislation/pre-release-access/index.html.

The list of post holders granted pre-release access can be found as a separate document accompanying each release.

Accessibility and clarity

Ofsted releases are published in an accessible format on the gov.uk website. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data. Each release includes outcomes from Ofsted inspections that have subsequently been published. The data are aimed at keeping users informed of the progress of the inspection framework and of changes in the maintained schools and academies sector.

Supporting metadata in an accessible format accompany each release in order to allow users to perform their own analysis. Users may use and re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/>.

This metadata consists of provider level files in excel and csv. An excel file is also provided with additional charts.

Performance, cost and respondent burden

There is no respondent burden in relation to this statistics release as data are a by-product of Ofsted's inspection process. The only cost involved is the internal resource involved in collating the release.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

Where sensitive or personal data are held by Ofsted the disclosure control processes we have in place ensure that this data is not published. This includes suppressing the number of pupils for providers with fewer than three pupils on roll.

All data releases follow Ofsted's confidentiality and revisions policies which can be found in these locations: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics.

Glossary

Academies

Academies are publicly funded independent schools. Academies do not have to follow the national curriculum and can set their own term times. They still have to follow the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as other state schools.

Academies get money direct from the government, not the local authority. They are run by an academy trust which employs the staff. Some academies have sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups. Sponsors are responsible for improving the performance of their schools.

Academies include converter and sponsor-led academies, free schools, university technical colleges and studio schools.

Academy converter

Academy converters are the most common type of academy. They do not have to follow the national curriculum and can set their own term times. They still have to follow the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as other state schools.

Academy converters retain their latest inspection grade, even if the most recent inspection was of the predecessor school.

Academy sponsor-led

Sponsor-led academies are academies which have sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups. Sponsors are responsible for improving the performance of their schools.

Sponsor-led academies are viewed as new legal entities and do not retain their inspection history.

Free schools

Free schools are funded by the government but are not run by the local authority. They are set-up on a not-for-profit basis by charities, universities, and community and faith groups, among others.

Free schools are 'all-ability' schools, so cannot use academic selection processes like a grammar school. They can set their own pay and conditions for staff and change

the length of school terms and the school day. Free schools do not have to follow the national curriculum.

Maintained schools

Maintained schools are funded by the government and run by the local authority. They must follow the national curriculum.