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Home > Education, training and skills > Inspections and performance of education providers > Inspection and performance of schools > Inspection of independent schools > Non-association independent schools inspections and outcomes in England: August 2020

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Official Statistics

Methodology and quality report: non-association independent schools inspections and outcomes in England

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Contents

Introduction
Methodology
Quality
Relevance
Coherence and comparability
Accuracy and reliability
Timeliness and punctuality
Accessibility and clarity
Performance, cost and respondent burden
Confidentiality, transparency and security
Glossary
Further information

Print this page

Introduction

This paper contains methodology and quality information regarding Ofsted's release of official statistics relevant to non-association independent schools, including information on inspection volumes and outcomes. We publish these once a year.

This release informs on the outcomes of all inspections of non-association schools carried out between 1 September 2019 and 31 August 2020. Additionally, we have provided details of all non-association schools in England that are open and eligible for inspection, including information on their most recent Ofsted inspection outcomes at the end of the above specified period.

This methodology and quality report will make most sense if read alongside and as a supplement to the notes already contained within the statistical release.

Methodology

From September 2015, data in this official statistics series is from inspections carried out under sections 99, 109(1) and 109(2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The regulations set out the standards that inspectors report on. This includes the extent to which the school meets the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (referred to as the independent school standards).

You can find details on the dates of the inspections that are included within the release. Any inspection reports published after the cut-off date will be included in our next release. If an inspection report was not published by 30 September 2020, then the previous inspection, if available, is reported as the school's most recent inspection.

We have separated data into 2 categories for analysis:

- 'in-year' inspections, which have occurred within the academic year and have been published by the given date
- 'most recent' inspection outcomes of schools that are open at the end of the reporting period

There is a time delay of 1 calendar month between the end of the reporting period (31 August 2020) and the publication cut-off date (30 September 2020). In order to accurately report main findings in the official statistics, we minimise bias by ensuring that we have published the reports for most inspections carried out within the reporting period. For instance, the inspection reports for schools judged inadequate go through additional moderation checks throughout the year. We publish most of these inspections reports ahead of the publication cut-off date. This is to ensure that the number of positive overall effectiveness judgements reported is not disproportionately high.

We may withhold publication of an inspection report under exceptional circumstances. Outcomes of withheld inspection reports are not included in any official statistics.

Data in this release is also used to update Ofsted's DataView tool.

Most recent inspection outcomes data provides a state of the nation look at all schools open on the final day of the reporting period (31 August 2020). If a school closed on 31 August but we inspected them within the reporting period, we would also include this school in the dataset.

Types of education

The official statistics of non-association independent schools includes 2 types of education:

- other independent schools
- other independent special schools

All state-funded and independent schools must register with the Department for Education (DfE). If a school provides early years education, this may require a separate registration with us to guarantee inclusion in the Early Years Register (EYR). If an early years provider is not included in the EYR, we will inspect it as part of the section 109 school inspection. We include outcomes for these inspections in this release. Early years schools that are included in the EYR will have an Ofsted early years inspection. We include these outcomes in the early years statistical release. For information on Ofsted early years inspections, refer to the official statistics for early years and childcare.

For boarding and residential schools that have gone through a section 109 school inspection, this will have included an inspection of the schools' welfare provision, when possible. These are referred to as 'integrated inspections'.

For schools that are also registered as children's homes, inspections may happen as either a full inspection of the children's home or as standalone inspections of the education provision. We attempt to avoid standalone inspections when possible. This is so inspectors can work together and share evidence in a full inspection of the children's home. Separate reports are always produced for full, or 'aligned', inspections: one provided to the DfE that covers the education provision and one for Ofsted that reports on the welfare inspection. The independent schools official statistics does not report on grades from the welfare inspection.

Recent changes

As of September 2019, all early years settings on the EYR, state-funded schools, non-association independent schools and further education and skills providers are inspected under the education inspection framework (EIF). This replaced the common inspection framework (CIF), which was in place from 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2019.

See the latest documentation for the inspections of non-association schools.

Quality

The UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics provides producers of statistics with a framework based on 3 pillars:

- trustworthiness
- quality
- value

This code is consistent with the European Statistics Code of Practice, where statistical output quality is broken down by 5 dimensions:

- relevance

- coherence and comparability
- accuracy and reliability
- timeliness and punctuality
- accessibility and clarity

This section will discuss these 5 dimensions and will provide additional information on meeting user needs.

Relevance

Through the inspection and regulation of schools and other settings, we aim to raise standards and improve lives: in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. These official statistics provide valuable evidence on the quality of schools in England and can inform the general public, government and policy to improve standards across the school sector.

We inspect non-association independent schools in accordance with sections 109(1) and 109(2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

During a standard inspection of a non-association independent school, we also assess whether the school meets the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

We introduced the EIF in September 2019, under which schools are judged as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate.

School inspection data is collated and summarised by these official statistics. We present judgements on schools as proportions of the total number of inspections, allowing us to identify key messages from the data. We also aim to identify any differences, patterns or trends in the data by analysing it in different ways, for example by government office region, faith or type of school. We communicate the messages in this release in an accessible way so that a wide user base can understand them, enabling users to interpret and manipulate the data as they require. Users include the DfE, local authorities, academics and the third sector.

Potential uses of the information provided by the official statistics include, but are not limited to, the following ways:

- media outlets using the main findings to inform the public about school quality across the country and particularly in local areas
- allowing users to monitor movement in the education sector across time, considering quality of provision geographically as well as among provider types
- making education policy decisions based on the accurate and current information in these statistics
- identifying areas of weak performance both for individual schools and nationally across the independent school sector. In turn, the DfE can

respond appropriately to any issues identified and develop their policy strategies to mitigate them
- the Ofsted Annual Report is directly reliant on the main messages contained within the official statistics. Furthermore, we can use the data to continually evolve our inspection framework and inform policies to improve standards

The data included in the release is generated by our regulation and inspection process and is therefore administrative data.

Revisions

The aim is to provide high-quality data subject to rigorous integrity checks. However, occasionally revisions to the data may be necessary to correct errors, or if subsequent information or data is received. We publish revisions to official statistics in line with our revisions policy.

Coherence and comparability

Some of the tables and charts within the release compare yearly inspection outcomes across time (including the current year). We reflect framework changes since the first statistical release, notably the introduction of the EIF in September 2019, in the publications. We also mark these on the charts. We have mapped changes to the way we grade overall effectiveness, and other sub-judgements when possible, across frameworks.

We will communicate inspection framework changes in the introduction and methodology sections of the main findings document. Furthermore, we have added guidance to the main findings document regarding any inspection framework and methodological changes.

We will also present data of inspection outcomes presented in provisional official statistics releases in DataView. We may publish inspection reports after the final publication date included within a release. In this case, the next provisional official statistics release will include these outcomes in the revised data for the previous release.

No other entity publishes comparable data for official or national statistics for non-association independent school inspections in England:

- in Scotland, Education Scotland carries out inspections
- in Wales, Estyn carries out inspections
- in Northern Ireland, the Education and Training Inspectorate carries out inspections

We are not responsible for and cannot comment on any third-party tools that display publicly available Ofsted inspection judgements.

Changes that affect how comparable data is across time

Schools moving in and out of scope for inspection by Ofsted inspectorate

We only inspect non-association independent schools, which are schools that are not members of an independent school association. The Secretary of State has approved 1 inspectorate responsible for independent school association schools: the Independent Schools Inspectorate. It is possible for schools to move between associations and therefore come under the remit of a different inspectorate. This will affect the appearance of the inspection history of the school in the release.

The release shows the most recent Ofsted inspection of a particular school, but does not report on any inspections carried out by other inspectorates. This may result in the appearance that a school has gone without an inspection for an extended period, when a different inspectorate has in fact inspected it in that period. Similarly, schools that have been previously inspected by us but now fall under a different inspectorate are not included in the release.

Integrated inspections

If a school offers residential boarding or is a residential special school, we aim to inspect both the education and boarding provision during the same inspection, known as an ‘integrated inspection’, to increase efficiency. Integrated inspections are shown in tables summarising inspection volumes.

Schools that are also registered as children’s homes may have their education provision inspected alone or be aligned with the full inspection of the children’s home. We will attempt to align both inspections so that inspectors may work together and share evidence. Aligned inspections still result in separate reports – 1 provided to the DfE covering the education provision and 1 for Ofsted covering the welfare inspection. Ofsted does not report welfare inspection grades as part of the independent schools official statistics.

Frameworks

Changes to the inspection framework can affect the consistency of our reporting. For example, a change in judgements between frameworks may result in breaks or changes in the way those judgements are reported.

Ofsted introduced the EIF in September 2019. The framework is accompanied by guidance and an inspection handbook for each of the 4 remits.

Introduction of the EIF has had the following impacts on current reporting:

- overall effectiveness: this judgement is reported consistently across all frameworks from September 2005 to the current framework
- effectiveness of leadership and management: this judgement is reported consistently across all frameworks from September 2005 to the current framework

- quality of education: this judgement was introduced with the EIF. Analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally and across time
- personal development: this judgement was introduced with the EIF. Analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally and across time
- behaviour and attitudes: this judgement was introduced with the EIF. Analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally and across time
- early years provision (if applicable): this judgement is reported consistently across all frameworks from September 2005 to the current framework. However, due to legislation changes, this judgement was not reported on for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years. Nursery schools have not received a separate early years judgement since September 2015
- sixth-form provision (if applicable): this judgement has been reported consistently since September 2005 to the current framework. However, due to legislation changes, this judgement was not reported on for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years
- some sub-judgements reported under the CIF have been superseded and are no longer reported in this release. These are: ‘quality of teaching, learning and assessment’, ‘personal development, behaviour and welfare’ and ‘outcomes for pupils’. Users wishing to obtain these outcomes may consult individual inspection reports

Policy implications

We must inspect all schools to which sections 109(1) and 109(2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008 apply within prescribed intervals. These schools will typically receive a standard inspection within 3 years of the previous. However, we do not inspect all schools with equal regularity. We take a proportionate approach to inspection, as our inspection frameworks indicate.

The result of this is that the schools inspected in a particular academic year are only a subset of all schools. They are unlikely to represent schools as a whole. You should apply diligence when comparing school inspection outcomes across years. The reasons for this are discussed in the following sections.

Frequency of inspections

All schools received a standard inspection within 3 years from September 2015. A new 3-year cycle of standard inspections began in September 2018.

Schools inspected from January 2015 that are judged as less than good will usually receive another standard inspection within 2 years of the previous standard inspection.

Since January 2015, schools that are judged to be inadequate normally receive a progress monitoring inspection before their next standard inspection. Schools that are judged as requires improvement following a standard inspection may also receive a progress monitoring inspection before their next standard inspection. These allow inspectors to assess the progress of the school in addressing any independent school standards that were not met and any other qualitative issues identified at the previous standard inspection.

If, during its standard inspection, we found that a school had met all the independent school standards but other qualitative issues resulted in a judgement of requires improvement, a progress monitoring inspection will judge whether the school continues to comply with the standards that the qualitative issues relate to.

Carrying out additional inspections as part of a standard inspection

The DfE may commission Ofsted to carry out a standalone additional inspection or an inspection as part of a standard inspection. The DfE may also commission Ofsted to specifically inspect a school:

- for a school’s application to make a material change to its registration
- to evaluate the school’s implementation of its action plan
- to check that the school is meeting independent school standards that were previously not met
- through an emergency inspection due to concerns arising from a complaint or other information received about a school

Each of these has its own classification of inspection.

In order to increase efficiency, we will recommend to the DfE that we combine commissioned additional inspections with any standard inspection when they are already scheduled to take place in the same or following term. This will result in a single inspection event and a single published report.

New schools

Before opening a new school, the proprietors must first apply to the DfE for registration. The DfE asks proprietors to supply the information set out in section 98 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 and The Independent Educational Provision in England) (Provision of Information) and Non-Maintained Special Schools (England) and Independent School Standards (Amendment) Regulations 2018.

Before the prospective school can open, the DfE requires Ofsted to perform a pre-registration inspection as per the Education and Skills Act 2008. Before the inspection begins, inspectors will consider a school’s written application as evidence of the school’s readiness to open, which will advise the Secretary of State. During the pre-registration inspection, the inspector will assess the extent to which the school is likely to meet the independent school standards at the time of the school’s opening and indicate this to the DfE. The DfE will decide on whether to register the school. From the summer term 2018, we have published these reports on our website and made these available to the school.

Once registered, a new school will receive their first standard inspection in their first year of operation. We publish these reports as normal on our website.

Boarding or residential provision

If a school provides residential boarding and the provision has been judged good or outstanding, we will inspect it within 3 years. If this provision has been judged as less than good, it will receive a subsequent standard inspection within 2 years. We inspect the provision annually in residential special schools.

In order to increase efficiency, we will integrate the inspection of boarding or residential provision in a boarding or residential special school with the school inspection when inspection cycles coincide. If inspection cycles do not coincide, only an inspection of the boarding or residential provision will be carried out.

Separately registered childcare provision

Early years or childcare provision of greater than 2 hours per day that is not managed by the school's proprietor or governing body must normally be registered with Ofsted. If provision managed directly by the school's proprietor or governing body includes care for children under 2 years old, or if no child attending is a pupil of the school, it must be registered with Ofsted. We do not assess this provision as part of an inspection of the school.

Revised independent school standards

Revised independent school standards came into force from 5 January 2015. These apply to independent schools and, in part, to academies and free schools.

Accuracy and reliability

This release reports on:

- the most recent Ofsted inspection grade of all open non-association independent schools
- inspections that have taken place during the academic year

A cut-off date for the publication of the reports included is given in the publication (inspected by 31 August 2020 and published by 30 September 2020). We exclude schools that have yet to receive an inspection from charts and tables but they remain in the underlying datasets. Occasionally, an inspection report will be withheld following publication, usually to complete minor amendments with the agreement of the school, and we will not include this in inspection outcomes. Charts and tables will include footnotes to advise in these cases. Neither will we include the inspection judgements if we publish the inspection report after the cut-off date. These will appear in later releases as revisions, after we have published them.

We provide moderation to all overall inspection judgements of inadequate. This may delay the publication of those reports until after the publication cut-off date. Therefore, these provisional statistics may contain a bias in underrepresenting the number of inadequate schools. Furthermore, if we require further evidence to secure the inspection evidence base, we will delay publication of the inspection report.

This release only includes inspection outcomes of Ofsted-inspected non-association independent schools. We include inspection outcomes for state-funded schools, further education and skills providers and providers of early years provision in separate releases.

Use of Ofsted administrative data

We extract data on inspection outcomes from our administrative systems. While we aim to produce the highest quality data, errors in recording inspection outcomes may affect the quality of source data. We perform a number of rigorous quality assurance checks to minimise the risk of reporting error.

Since September 2015

The lead inspector is responsible for entering inspection outcomes data onto our systems. We perform a quality assurance process at this stage to minimise the risk of errors. Furthermore, we perform an additional quality assurance check on a sample of entries to make sure the original inspection report matches the data on the administrative system. We focus our attention on checking entries where the risk of error is likely to be greatest, for example, if the inspection outcome awarded changes during the quality assurance process. If in the unlikely event that a data error is still identified on our systems and this affects the quality of the data, we will provide a note in the release.

Technical production

Manual errors may also arise from the technical production process. We perform additional quality assurance on the data at this stage to minimise the risk of errors. On identifying an error, we will place a note on the website and upload a corrected version of the document as soon as possible.

See more information of the issues relating to the use of administrative data.

Data obtained from other sources

Get Information About Schools (GIAS) provides data on a school’s type and phase of education. This data is considered to be of good quality.

The DfE must verify any change to the type of education. Independent schools have some remit to change their age range through a local process. However, changes to key stages usually require agreement from the DfE and a material change inspection from Ofsted. The DfE’s validation processes do pick up any errors but this may be after the event. Schools are now required to update their

GIAS record every 90 days.

Timeliness and punctuality

We publish data once a year and this includes details of standard inspections that have taken place and we have published within the most recent complete academic year, and the most recent inspection (of any time) a school has received from Ofsted.

We publish data at 9:30am on the date pre-announced in the statistical release calendar. Information on any delay in publication can also be found on the statistical release calendar.

We may include inspection reports in the data if we publish them within 1 calendar month of the cut-off date (31 August 2020). This allows for the majority of inspections that have occurred within the reporting period to be published. The production process includes obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and uploading the information onto GOV.UK. This takes on average 6 weeks.

We give pre-release access in accordance with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (2008). You can find the list of postholders granted pre-release access on a separate document accompanying each release.

Accessibility and clarity

We publish our releases in an accessible format on GOV.UK. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data.

We accompany each release with supporting metadata in an accessible format. This enables users to perform their own analysis on the data. This information may be used and re-used free of charge and in any format and medium (excluding logos), under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

Performance, cost and respondent burden

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

Confidentiality, transparency and security

We may hold sensitive or personal data. The disclosure control processes we have in place ensure that this data is not published. All data releases follow our confidentiality and revisions policies.

Glossary

Definitions of terms are in our glossary.

Further information

Contact us

Constructive feedback on our statistical releases is always welcome. Please direct any comments, questions or suggestions about the data, its presentation or interpretation to the Early Years and Independent Schools Analysis team at Childcaredataqueries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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