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Guidance
Education inspection framework
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Introduction

The education inspection framework ('the framework') sets out how Ofsted inspects education providers in England to ensure a high quality education for children, young people and adult learners in education and skills provision and registered early years settings in England.

The framework has been devised by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for use from September 2019. It sets out the principles that apply to inspection, and the main judgements that inspectors make when carrying out inspections of maintained schools, academies, independent schools, further education and skills providers, childcare providers and registered early years settings in England. For a full list, see 'Inspection inspected under the framework'.

The framework applies to the inspection of different education, skills and early years settings to ensure comparability when lessons can be learnt from one setting to another. It supports consistency across the inspection of different sectors.

Note that we use the term 'learners' throughout for brevity; this should be read as all those attending education, skills and registered early years settings.

The framework reflects relevant legislation for each type of setting. These inspections are carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), the Education and Inspections Act 2006, section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The inspection of registered early years provision is carried out under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. All inspections carried out using the framework will include these statutory requirements.

The framework is accompanied by an inspection handbook for each of the 4 remits:

- maintained early years provision
- maintained schools and academies
- non-association independent schools
- further education and skills

These handbooks set out how inspectors will make each of the inspection judgements. They reflect the needs and expectations of different children and the different ways between various age groups. Inspectors will inspect and report on provision that they have appropriate expertise and training.

Principles of inspection and regulation

We are required to carry out our work in ways that encourage the services we inspect and regulate to improve. To be user-focused and to be efficient and effective in their use of resources we follow the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Inspection provides independent, external evaluation and assurance about the education provided to children, young people and adult learners, providing a range of evidence that is evaluated against an inspection framework and takes into account of our policies and relevant legislation in areas such as safeguarding, equality and diversity.

Inspection provides important information to parents, carers, learners and employers about the quality of education, skills and early years provision, and it provides the most informed choice based on the information published in inspection reports.

The framework sets out the judgements that apply to education, skills and early years provision. It has been underpinned by consistent, researched criteria for inspecting those judgements. Inspectors will take comparable approaches to gathering evidence and making judgements, taking into account the context of the provision, including the age of learners and the type of provision. Inspectors will comply with relevant guidance and codes of conduct, such as the Home Office guidance 'Powers of entry: code of practice'. they will always try to be curious.

Inspection provides assurance to the public and to government that minimum standards of education, skills and childcare are being met that - where relevant - public money is being spent well, and that arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A force for improvement

Ofsted exists to be a force for improvement through intelligent, responsible and independent inspection. Our vision is to be a world-class, learner-focused, organisation. Inspection under the framework is to bring about improvement. Our strategy promotes this. For more information, see 'Ofsted's strategy 2019 to 2022'.

Through the use of evidence, research and inspection training, we ensure that our judgements are as valid and reliable as they can be. These judgements focus on key strengths, and what other providers can learn intelligently, and what other providers from which the provider should seek to improve. Our inspections act as a trigger for others to take action.

Helping to protect learners

Inspectors will always take into account what learners are helped and protected to be safe. They are vulnerable. Although inspectors will not provide a separate numerical grade for the safeguarding aspect of provision, they will always make a written judgement about learners' leadership and management' about whether the arrangements for safeguarding learners are effective.

Providers should know what's early years, education and skills settings' sets out the approach inspectors should take to inspecting safeguarding in all the settings covered by the framework. It should be read alongside the framework and handbooks.

Inspectors are also requested to be familiar with the statutory guidance about safeguarding. This should take this into account when inspecting:

- Keeping children safe in education: statutory guidance for schools and colleges on safeguarding children and safe recruitment
- Working together to safeguard children

The Equality Act 2010

The framework is intended to be a force for improvement for all learners. The framework supports providers to meet the duty of equality that the expectation is that all learners will receive high quality, satisfactory education.

Inspectors will assess the extent to which the provider complies with the relevant legal duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010 (including, where relevant, the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Conduct during Ofsted inspections

It is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a positive working relationship based on courteous and professional behaviour. We expect our inspectors to uphold the highest professional standards in their work, and to treat everyone they encounter with courtesy and respect. Inspectors will follow the Ofsted Inspector Handbook, which outlines our expectations of inspectors and the conduct of Ofsted inspectors and Ofsted's expectations of providers during inspection.

Provision inspected under the education inspection framework

The framework applies to inspections of:

- maintained schools and academies under section 5 (which includes all sponsor-led academies, academy converter schools, academy special schools, free schools, alternative provision academies, 16 to 19 academies, university technical academies, university technical colleges and studio schools, 16 to 19 academies and 16 to 19 studio schools are also inspected under this framework)
- non-maintained special schools (as prescribed by the Secretary of State under section 142 of the Education Act 1996)
- pupil referral units
- non-association independent schools, as defined in the Education Act 1996 (this definition brings into the scope of inspection a number of very small independent schools, many of which have dual registration as an independent boarding school and provide exclusively for vulnerable looked after young people who may also be accommodated in children's homes or secure units)
- further education colleges, sixth form colleges and independent specialist colleges independent learning providers
- community learning and skills providers
- employers funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to train their own apprentices
- higher education institutions providing further education
- providers of learning in the judicial services
- National Careers Service – careers advice and guidance
- registered early years settings

The grading scale used for inspection judgements

We will use a 4-point grading scale to all inspectors to make the principal judgements:

- grade 1 – outstanding
- grade 2 – good
- grade 3 – requires improvement
- grade 4 – inadequate

Judgements made by inspectors

The framework ensures that inspectors make a coherent set of judgements across the different education, skills and early years settings. The remit handbooks set out the methods inspectors use to gather evidence and the main criteria they use to make judgements. In each remit handbook, these methods and criteria are common across the different remits, but there will inevitably be some variation.

Overall effectiveness

Inspectors will use all the available evidence to evaluate what it is like to a learner in the provider. This judgement is based on professional judgement. Inspectors will consider whether the standard of education, training or care is good or outstanding. If it is not at least good, inspectors will consider whether it requires improvement or is inadequate.

Key judgements

Inspectors will use more graded judgements on the following areas using the 4-point scale:

- quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- personal development
- leadership and management

What inspectors will consider when making judgements

Inspectors will use the following criteria to make each of the graded judgements. These criteria are set out in the remit handbooks. Inspectors will use the remit handbooks and remit handbooks explain how these criteria are applied in each context. We have updated the handbooks to reflect the COVID-19 context that education providers are operating in. Inspectors will take into account the impact this has on learners, and the feedback and knowledge under review in circumstances change and we continue to emerge from the pandemic.

Note that we use the term 'teachers' throughout for brevity; this should be read as including early years practitioners, lecturers, trainers and assessors.

Quality of education

Inspectors will make a judgement on the quality of education by evaluating the extent to which:

Intent

- leaders take on or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or high needs, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life
- the provider's curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced towards ambitious, sufficiently sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment
- the provider has the same academic, technical or vocational ambitions for almost all learners. Where this is not practical – for example, for some learners with high needs – the provider's ambitious for these learners should be clear and high. It should lead to suitable for full curriculum. Providers ensure this by teaching a full range of subjects for as long as possible. 'specialising' only when necessary.

Implementation

- teachers have good knowledge of the subject(s) and courses they teach. Leaders provide effective support, including for those teaching outside their main areas of specialism
- learners progress at a faster rate, promoting appropriate discussion about the subject matter they are teaching. They check learners' understanding systematically, and adapt presentations and explanations skilfully and flexibly. They ask the right questions and identify misconceptions that relate to necessary, without unnecessarily elaborate or differentiated approaches
- over the course of study, teaching is designed to help learners to remember more long-term the content they have been taught and to integrate new knowledge into existing schemes
- teachers' and leaders use assessment well, for example to help learners recall what they have learned or to check understanding and inform teaching. Leaders understand the limitations of assessment and do not use it in a way that creates unnecessary workload or burdens teachers
- the provider's curriculum is sequenced that allows the learner to focus on learning. The resources and materials that teachers select – in a way that avoids an unnecessary workload for staff – reflect the provider's ambitious intentions for the curriculum. Teachers are supported to use the curriculum as intended. Lessons are sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment
- a rigorous approach to the teaching of reading develops learners' confidence and enjoyment in reading. At the early stages of learning to read, reading materials are closely matched to learners' phonic knowledge

Impact

- learners develop detailed knowledge and skills across the curriculum and, as a result, achieve well. Where relevant, this is reflected in results from national tests and examinations that meet government expectations, or in the qualitative evidence
- learners are ready for the next stage of education, employment or training. Where relevant, the qualifications that allow them to go on to destinations that meet their interests, aspirations and the intention of their course of study. They read widely and often, with fluency and comprehension.

Behaviour and attitudes

Inspectors will make a judgement on behaviour and attitudes by evaluating the extent to which:

- the provider has high expectations for learners' behaviour and conduct and applies these expectations consistently and fairly. This is reflected in learners' behaviour and attitudes
- learners' attitudes to their education or training are positive. They are committed to their learning, know how to study effectively and do so, are resilient to setbacks and take pride in their achievements
- learners have high attendance and are punctual
- the provider's culture and ethos promote a positive and respectful culture
- leaders, teachers and learners create an environment where bullying, peer on peer abuse or discrimination are not tolerated. If they do occur, staff deal with issues quickly and effectively, and do not allow them to spread

Personal development

Inspectors will make a judgement on the personal development of learners by evaluating the extent to which:

- the curriculum extends beyond the academic, technical or vocational. It provides for learners' broader development, enabling them to develop and discover their interests and talents
- the curriculum and the provider's wider work support learners to develop their character, including their resilience, confidence and independence, allowing them know how to live physically and mentally healthy
- of each stage of education, the provider prepares learners for future success in their next stage
- the provider prepares learners for life in modern Britain by equipping them to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society, developing their understanding of fundamental British values, developing understanding and appreciation of diversity, celebrating what we have in common and promoting respect for the different protected characteristics as defined in law

Leadership and management

Inspectors will make a judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management by evaluating the extent to which:

- leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality, inclusive education and training for all. This is realised through strong, shared values, policies and practices
- leaders focus on improving staff's subject, pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge to enhance the teaching of the curriculum and the appropriate use of assessment. This practice and subject knowledge of staff are built and improved over time
- leaders aim to ensure that all learners complete their programmes of study. They provide the support that staff to make this possible and do not place excessive or pointless (there is no legal definition of 'unfeasible', however, we define 'unfeasible' as 'impossible to accomplish') workload or burdens on teachers. They ensure permanent exclusions or by encouraging a parent to remove their child, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the provider rather than in the best interests of the child. Fixed-term exclusions are used only as a last resort
- leaders engage effectively with learners and others in their community, including where relevant – parents, carers, employers and local services
- leaders engage with their staff and are aware and take account of the main pressures on them. They are realistic and constructive in the way that they manage staff workload and well-being
- leaders protect their staff from bullying and harassment
- those responsible for governance understand their role and carry this out effectively. They ensure that they receive sufficient information and challenge to ensure that they are aware of the risks and barriers to success for the quality of education or training
- those with responsibility for governance ensure that the provider fulfils its statutory duties, for example under the Equality Act 2010, and other duties, for example in relation to the 'Prevent' strategy and safeguarding, and promoting the welfare of learners
- the provider has a culture of safeguarding that supports effective arrangements to identify learners who may need early help or who are at risk of neglect, abuse, grooming or exploitation, help learners reduce their risk of harm by securing the safety of others, or intervening in a timely way to those who have the expertise to assess concerns and who have clear and adequate school details who may be cause to learners and vulnerable adults.

Inspectors will always report on whether arrangements for safeguarding learners are effective.

Arrangements for different types of provision

In addition to the judgements set out in the framework, inspectors will need to make a variety of other judgements and carry out regulatory activity in different types of provision. This section sets out those additional judgements and activities.

Early years

The framework sets out how we will inspect providers on the Early Years Register. In addition to inspection, we also are responsible for the registration and regulation of childcare providers. We need more about the registration and regulation of settings on the Early Years Register.

Non-association independent schools

Non-association independent schools are subject to the independent School Standards. Inspectors will check that schools meet these standards during inspection.

We give maintained schools, academies and non-association independent schools that have early years foundation stage provision a separate grade for that provision as part of school inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as amended by the Education Act 2011 (or section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008 for academies). This grade is in addition to the grade for the rest of the school inspection. This contributes to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school.

Schools with sixth forms

We give maintained schools, academies and non-association independent schools a separate grade for sixth form provision as part of school inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (or as amended by the Education Act 2011 or section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008). This contributes to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school.

Settings with residential and boarding provision

The inspection of boarding and residential provision will be carried out under the Education Act 2005 (section 50(2)(b) and section 50(3)(b)). Inspectors will check the national minimum standards for boarding or residential provision, as appropriate.

Further details of how these boarding or residential inspections will be carried out can be found in the sections of our social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) for boarding schools and residential special schools and residential provision of further education colleges.

Further education and skills provision

Further education and skills providers will also have the following types of provision graded where appropriate: education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and traineeships. Inspectors will make these judgements and contribute to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

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