

A good education for all: inspection of local authority services

Consultation document

This is a consultation document on Ofsted's proposals to introduce a new framework for the inspection of local authority services for supporting improvement in schools and other providers.

Ofsted seeks the widest possible range of views from those who have an interest in, or expertise relating to, local authority support services to ensure that the framework takes proper account of the needs and circumstances of all interested parties.

Above all, the new inspection framework must assure the quality of services provided by local authorities to schools and other providers, including schools causing concern, so that all children and young people have access to a good quality education irrespective of where they live or their personal circumstances.

The closing date for the consultation is 19 March 2013.

If you would like a version of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

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About Ofsted

1. 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.

Purpose and background to the consultation

2. This consultation seeks your views on proposals to introduce a new framework for the inspection of those specific local authority functions that promote high standards and the fulfilment of potential. Ofsted has the power to inspect particular functions of the local authority (including the education function) under section 136 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006. This inspection framework will evaluate how well the local authority is carrying out its statutory duty. Your views will help to refine and develop the framework.
3. HMCI's Annual Report 2011/12 drew national attention to the marked inequality of access by children and young people to a good school across the country and to the wide variation between areas. This can adversely affect the life chances of young people. The Annual Report states that the role of local authorities has reduced in terms of the direct control they have over schools and the support they can provide for schools and other providers, particularly where secondary schools are no longer a local authority maintained school. However, local authorities have statutory responsibility, as set out in section 13A of the Education Act 1996, and a range of powers they may use to drive school improvement.
4. Ofsted has powers to inspect particular functions that are carried out by a local authority under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This includes inspection of the local authority's performance of its duties in relation to education and training. The Secretary of State may also require the Chief Inspector to carry out such an inspection.
5. We intend to introduce a sharply focused and bespoke inspection framework that will evaluate the effectiveness and impact of education and training functions provided by the local authority where schools and other providers are not yet good or where they are not improving quickly enough. We are proposing the following.
 - Ofsted will carry out individual inspections of the education and training function of local authorities where information about schools and other providers in that area tells us that standards and effectiveness are either too variable or not yet good.
 - Inspection will be focused only on where it is needed most; Ofsted will develop an inspection framework for those local authorities that are identified for inspection. Ofsted does not intend to inspect all local authority education functions to either a prescribed and/or regular interval.

- Ofsted will not use a four-point scale to judge effectiveness (that is, outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate), but instead will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of such functions and consider whether the functions are being exercised effectively or not.
 - Inspectors will report against a published evaluation schedule, which will specify quality criteria. Consultation events and the outcomes of a good practice survey will influence the development of this.
 - Ofsted will report and publish the findings in a letter rather than in a lengthy report.
 - For those local authorities deemed not to be exercising their duties effectively, inspectors will consider whether the local authority will require re-inspection after a suitable interval.
6. Subject to the outcome of this consultation we intend to begin inspections in the first local authorities from 1 May 2013. Prior to this, a good practice survey of a small number of local authorities is being undertaken in the spring term 2013 to inform the development of the framework. In addition, we are asking additional questions about the impact of local authority support for schools during some inspections in early 2013. A separate telephone survey of schools to inform development work will also be undertaken in early 2013.
7. In developing the framework, we will carefully consider the responses to this consultation and the information gathered from the activities set out in the paragraph above, and from a number of key consultations, including: SOLACE; the Association of Directors of Children's Services; the Local Government Association (LGA); headteacher reference groups; and other stakeholders.
8. Consultation events will include:
- an online consultation
 - an online survey with Ofsted's Parents' Panel, and Ofsted's Children and Young People's Panel
 - roundtable events with representatives from local authorities and other stakeholders to develop inspection proposals and evaluation criteria.
9. We will evaluate all the responses received from the consultation alongside the feedback gathered from the consultation events. At the end of the consultation period, we will publish the main findings from the consultation on our website.

Proposals for the inspection of local authority school improvement functions

Inspection criteria

10. We propose to introduce an inspection framework that will assess the effectiveness of the local authority in carrying out their education and training

functions for schools and other providers where data or other indicators of performance show that maintained schools and other providers are not performing as well as they should be. Ofsted proposes to use the following indicators to determine whether an inspection is required where one or more of the following apply:

- the proportion of children who attend a good or better maintained school, pupil referral unit and/or alternative provision is lower than that found nationally
- there is a higher than average number of schools in an Ofsted category of concern and/or there are indicators that progress of such schools is not securing rapid enough improvement
- there is a higher than average proportion of schools that have not been judged to be good by Ofsted
- attainment levels across the local authority are lower than that found nationally and/or where the trend of improvement is weak
- rates of progress, relative to starting points, are lower than that found nationally and/or where the trend of improvement is weak
- the volume of qualifying complaints to Ofsted about schools in a local authority area is a matter of concern
- the Secretary of State has concerns about the effectiveness of local authority school improvement functions.

11. Ofsted will inspect the effectiveness of local authority education and training functions in promoting improvement, high standards and the fulfilment of educational potential of children and young people in schools. Ofsted recognises that the configuration of school improvement functions will be diverse and relevant to local circumstances. Ofsted has no fixed view on the configuration of such functions, but will focus on their impact and effectiveness. In particular, Ofsted will evaluate:

- the effectiveness of corporate and strategic leadership of school improvement
- the clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting improvement in standards for schools and other providers, including how the local authority complies with its statutory obligations in relation to school improvement work and how well the local authority has defined its monitoring, challenge, support and intervention roles
- the extent to which the local authority knows its schools and other providers, their performance and the standards they achieve and how effectively support is focused on areas of greatest need
- the effectiveness of the local authority's identification of, and appropriate intervention in, underperforming schools and other providers, including the use of formal powers available to the local authority

- the impact of local authority support and challenge over time and the rate at which schools and other providers are improving
- the extent to which the local authority brokers support for schools and other providers
- the effectiveness of strategies to support highly effective leadership and management in schools and other providers
- support and challenge for school governance
- the use of funding to effect improvement, including how it is focused on areas of greatest need.

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that targeted inspections of local authorities, rather than universal inspections, is the right approach?

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the indicators that might be used to determine an inspection (paragraph 10) are appropriate?

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the inspection proposals in paragraphs 10 to 11 cover the right areas?

Do you have any general comments or suggestions on this proposal?

Inspection notice

12. Notice of up to five days will normally be given and the purpose of the inspection, the powers under which it is carried out and the arrangements for reporting on the inspection will be sent in writing to the relevant local authority. We believe that the proposed notice period strikes the right balance between the time needed for local authorities to prepare documentation and arrange meetings against the needs to see how things really are.

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed inspection notice period?

Do you have any comments or suggestions?

Inspection judgements

13. We do not propose to use the grade descriptors of outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate to report inspection findings, because it is not a universal inspection programme. We will, however, assess the strengths and weaknesses, and the impact, of education and training functions and arrive at a conclusion of whether such functions are being exercised effectively or not. If not, we propose that inspectors will consider whether the local authority will require re-inspection after a suitable interval.

14. In arriving at a judgement for the inspection proposals set out above in paragraph 11, inspectors will draw on guidance set out in an inspection handbook in order to benchmark their findings. The guidance will draw on statutory requirements and evidence determined by a good practice survey of local authorities and bespoke consultation events outlined in paragraphs 5 and 8.
15. We will describe what we mean by 'the effective exercise of education and training functions' in the inspection handbook so that local authorities, schools, inspectors and other interested people such as service users know what has to be achieved.

We do not intend to use a four-point grading scale for judging the effectiveness of local authority school improvement functions. We propose to evaluate strengths and weaknesses and arrive at a summary judgement of how effectively the functions are being exercised.

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that this is the right approach?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

Inspection reports

16. After each inspection, Ofsted will publish the inspection findings in letter form and on the Ofsted website. The letter will usually be sent to the local authority no later than 15 working days after the end of the inspection and will be published on Ofsted's website within 20 working days of the end of the inspection. Following this, the local authority must prepare a written statement setting out the actions it proposes to take in the light of the report and the timetable for doing so. The local authority must publish the report and the written statement.
17. Where inspectors inspect a local authority, the report will cover the evidence considered, the strengths and weaknesses of school improvement functions and areas for improvement for that local authority.
18. Each report will include a summary judgement about whether the quality and impact of such services are being delivered effectively or not. Where not, a recommendation will also be made about whether the local authority requires further monitoring visits.

Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should publish the inspection report findings in a letter format?

Do you have any comments or suggestions on this proposal?

The consultation process

We welcome your responses to this consultation paper. The consultation opens on 5 February and closes on 19 March 2013.

The information you provide us with will inform the development of the final framework and methodology for the inspection of the effectiveness of the local authority education and training function in promoting high standards and the fulfilment of educational potential in schools and other providers.

We will publish a response to the consultation in due course and plan to implement inspections from May 2013.

Sending back your questionnaire

There are three ways of completing and submitting the questionnaire in the next section and/or sending us comments:

Online electronic questionnaire

Visit our website to complete and submit an electronic version of the questionnaire: www.surveymonkey.com/s/ofsted-gefa-la.

Print and post

Visit our website to print a Word or PDF version of the questionnaire that can be filled in by hand: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-education-for-all-inspection-of-local-authority-services. When you have completed the questionnaire, please post it to:

Claire Scanlan
Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Download and email

Visit our website to download a Word version of the questionnaire that you can complete on your computer: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-education-for-all-inspection-of-local-authority-services. When you have completed the questionnaire, please email it to consultations@ofsted.gov.uk with the consultation name in the subject line.

Questionnaire for the inspection of local authority services

Confidentiality

The information you provide will be held by us. It will only be used for the purposes of consultation and research to help us to become more effective, shape policies and inform inspection and regulatory practice.

We will treat your identity in confidence, if you disclose it to us. However, we may publish an organisation's views.

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Yes please complete Section 1

No please complete Section 2

Section 1

If you are completing the consultation on behalf of an organisation and would like us to consider publishing the views of your organisation, please indicate this below.

Organisation: _____

Section 2

Which of the below best describes you? Please tick one option.

I am:

a headteacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	a local authority employee	<input type="checkbox"/>
a teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	a senior officer in a local authority	<input type="checkbox"/>
a parent	<input type="checkbox"/>	an Elected Member	<input type="checkbox"/>
a member of Ofsted's Parents' Panel	<input type="checkbox"/>	a young person	<input type="checkbox"/>
a school governor or board member	<input type="checkbox"/>	prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
other (please tell us)			

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that targeted inspections, rather than universal inspections of all local authorities, is the right approach?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments:

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the indicators that might be used to determine an inspection (paragraph 10) are appropriate?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments:

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the inspection proposals in paragraphs 10 to 11 cover the right areas?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments:

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed inspection notice period?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments:

We do not intend to use a four-point grading scale for judging the effectiveness of local authority school improvement services. We propose to evaluate strengths and weaknesses and arrive at a summary judgement of how effectively the functions are being exercised.

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that this is the right approach?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments:

Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should publish the inspection report findings in a letter format?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments:

Q7. Do you have any further comments? Please leave them here.

What did you think of this consultation?

One of the commitments in our strategic plan is to monitor whether our consultations are accessible to those wishing to take part.

Please tell us what you thought of this consultation by answering the questions below.

	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Don't know
I found the consultation information clear and easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I found the consultation easy to find on the Ofsted website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had enough information about the consultation topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would take part in a future Ofsted consultation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How did you hear about this consultation?

- Ofsted website
- Ofsted News
- Ofsted conference
- Another organisation (please specify, if known)
- Other (please specify)

Is there anything you would like us to improve on or do differently for future consultations? If so, please tell us below.

Thank you for taking part in our consultation.

Additional questions about you

Your answers to the following questions will help us to evaluate how successfully we are communicating messages from inspection to all sections of society. **We would like to assure you that all responses are confidential and you do not have to answer every question.**

Please tick the appropriate box.

1. Gender

Female <input type="checkbox"/>	Male <input type="checkbox"/>
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2. Age

Under 14 <input type="checkbox"/>	14-18 <input type="checkbox"/>	19-24 <input type="checkbox"/>	25-34 <input type="checkbox"/>	35-44 <input type="checkbox"/>	45-54 <input type="checkbox"/>	55-64 <input type="checkbox"/>	65+ <input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Ethnic origin

a) How would you describe your national group?

British or mixed British	<input type="checkbox"/>	English	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

How would you describe your ethnic group?

Asian		Mixed ethnic origin	
Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black African and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Caribbean and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other Asian background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other mixed ethnic background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Black		White	
African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any White background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other ethnic background	
Any other Black background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese			
Any Chinese background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

4. Sexual orientation

Heterosexual <input type="checkbox"/>	Lesbian <input type="checkbox"/>	Gay <input type="checkbox"/>	Bisexual <input type="checkbox"/>
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6. Religion/Belief

Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other, please state:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>		

7. Disability

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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