

Monitoring inspection visits and support for schools which require improvement

Guidance for inspecting schools which require improvement under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

This guidance sets out Ofsted's approach to supporting and challenging schools which require improvement. It indicates the main activities that may be undertaken from the time the school is judged to require improvement.

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Introduction

1. This guidance explains how Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) will monitor and support schools that were judged to require improvement at their most recent section 5 inspection. Schools which require improvement are not 'schools causing concern' as set out in the Education Act 2005. Nonetheless, they are not yet good. This document sets out the types of intervention and judgements that inspectors may make and report on during monitoring inspection visits. It also outlines the activities designed to support schools that require improvement.
2. Each school will be allocated four inspector days, to be used flexibly by the HMI responsible for monitoring and supporting the school. The range of support for schools requiring improvement may include:
 - up to three monitoring inspection visits – if leadership and management were judged to be good at the recent section 5 inspection, the school will normally receive only one such visit
 - an invitation to a good practice dissemination conference covering the range of key common weaknesses identified through inspection evidence (achievement and use of data; improving teaching and progress in learning; best practice in assessment, governance and performance management; self-evaluation)
 - an invitation to specific subject or aspect workshops
 - links brokered by HMI with good and outstanding schools locally as well as nationally
 - tailored sessions with HMI to share aspects of best practice
 - an invitation to headteachers to accompany HMI on an inspection of a 'high performing' school or a reinspection of a school that has made good progress in addressing areas for improvement.
3. Monitoring inspection visits are carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, but Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) may elect to treat them as section 5 inspections using his powers under section 9 of the Act.
4. All monitoring inspection visits are carried out in accordance with the principles and code of conduct for inspectors set out in *The framework for school inspection*.¹ In conducting the monitoring inspection inspectors will follow the methodology and protocols set out in the *School inspection handbook*.²

¹ *The framework for school inspection from September 2012*, Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090019.

² *School inspection handbook from September 2012*, Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120101.

5. Schools judged to require improvement are not required to prepare a separate action plan but are expected to amend their existing plans to address the areas for improvement identified by the section 5 inspection.
6. All schools judged to require improvement will receive one or more monitoring inspection visits, lasting no longer than one day, which will determine the nature and timing of further intervention and/or inspection activity to support improvement.
7. These monitoring and support arrangements do not prejudice the Chief Inspector's power under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 to 'inspect any school in England in circumstances where [s]he is not required to do so by section 5' of the Act.
8. Further general guidance, briefing papers on school inspections and other materials are available on Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Supporting the school's progress

9. All schools judged to require improvement will receive the first monitoring inspection visit usually within four to six weeks of the publication of the section 5 inspection report. This monitoring inspection visit will be carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), who will meet with the headteacher, the chair of the governing body and a further representative of the local authority, academy chain/federation or proprietor/sponsor. At this meeting, HMI will evaluate the school's improvement planning. Following the monitoring inspection visit, a judgement on the fitness for purpose of the school's improvement plans will be confirmed in a letter. The letter will also detail the likely pattern of any further monitoring inspection visits or support.
10. All schools requiring improvement will be reinspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, no later than 24 months after the inspection which judged them to require improvement.
11. During the first monitoring inspection visit, HMI will judge the fitness for purpose of the school's improvement planning.
12. Where there are two or more monitoring inspection visits, HMI will evaluate the school's progress towards becoming a good school. An overarching judgement will be made stating whether:
 - the school is making reasonable progress towards becoming a good school
 - or
 - the school is not making enough progress towards becoming a good school.
13. The judgement will be informed by the school's progress in dealing with each of the areas for improvement identified by the section 5 inspection. Other

factors that arise following the inspection must not be ignored. The second and third monitoring inspection visits will focus on selective aspects of the evaluation schedule using the same criteria in order to reach a judgement on the progress that the school has made on the key areas for improvement. It is important to note that pupils are unlikely to be well served by a school that has dealt with a range of peripheral matters while shying away from tougher and more fundamental actions needed to improve its performance.

Staffing and scheduling inspections

14. HMI should discuss the proposed intervention strategy for each school with their line manager, who will, if appropriate, consult the relevant managing inspector for schools causing concern.
15. Where a school that requires improvement has residential or boarding provision, the lead inspector should consult the Managing Inspector, Operational Lead for the Welfare Inspection of Boarding Schools³.

Conducting monitoring inspection visits

Notification

16. For the first monitoring inspection visit, the lead inspector will normally contact the school up to two days prior to the start of the inspection. It is essential that representatives of the local authority/proprietor/sponsor are available to meet with the inspector. On subsequent monitoring inspection visits, the lead inspector will normally inform the school that it is to be inspected, from noon on the working day before each inspection starts. Lead inspectors should be aware that they may not get through to the school immediately. They should reserve sufficient time to ensure that they make direct contact during the afternoon.
17. The purpose of the initial telephone call is for the lead inspector to:
 - confirm the date of the inspection
 - explain that the inspection is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005
 - confirm that the school is able to inform the governing body that the monitoring inspection is taking place
 - make sure that the headteacher understands the purpose and focus of the inspection and the judgement that will be made.
18. If the headteacher is unavailable, the lead inspector should ask to speak to the next most senior member of staff. Once the inspection has been confirmed, the

³ Further guidance for education and social care inspectors on conducting integrated monitoring inspections is available in *Conducting additional inspections of independent schools* (090060), Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090060.

lead inspector will inform the inspection service provider (ISP), who will send formal confirmation to the school by email.

19. **Requests for a deferral** will be handled in accordance with Ofsted's policy about the deferral of inspections.⁴ Lead inspectors must contact the helpdesk immediately. The deferral policy makes clear that the absence of the headteacher is not normally a reason for deferring an inspection.

The first monitoring inspection visit

20. The lead inspector will arrive at the school no earlier than 9am on the day of the inspection, following the arrangements discussed during the telephone conversation that announced the inspection.
21. On arrival at the school the lead inspector must show their identity badge and ask to see the headteacher. The headteacher should be advised that they may phone the National Business Unit (telephone: 0300 123 4234) to check on the identity of the lead inspector.
22. The purpose of the inspection is to:
 - gauge the leaders' and managers' initial response to the school being judged as 'requires improvement' and how well it is placed to achieve improvement
 - evaluate the extent to which the school's actions are rigorously focused on tackling the key areas for rapid improvement identified in the section 5 inspection
 - evaluate how effectively the school is adapting its existing school development or improvement plans to meet the challenges of improving rapidly to become a good school
 - evaluate the impact that governors at the school are having on bringing about the necessary improvements, taking account of the section 5 subsidiary guidance on assessing and reporting on the effectiveness of governance at the school – if governance was not identified as an area for improvement at the section 5 inspection but the monitoring inspection raises concerns about it, inspectors must include a recommendation in the monitoring letter that the school should commission an external review of governance
 - evaluate the impact of external support
 - offer guidance to the school, local authority, proprietor or sponsor to sharpen, where necessary, the effectiveness of their planning
 - discuss further necessary intervention.

⁴ *Deferral of inspections: information for schools*, Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/deferral-of-inspections-information-for-schools.

23. The structure of the day will usually be as follows:
- meeting with the headteacher/deputy headteacher or other senior leader, chair of the governing body and representatives from the local authority, the proprietor or the sponsor, as appropriate – this meeting should focus on actions taken so far to tackle the reasons the school was judged to require improvement
 - separate meetings with representatives of the local authority/proprietor/sponsor; the chair of the governing body; and the headteacher/deputy headteacher or other senior leader
 - during the monitoring inspection visit, the views of parents and carers about the school’s progress will be sought – where necessary and/or practicable a meeting between parents and the inspectors may be arranged
 - time to allow the lead inspector to reflect, draft the inspection letter and consider what, if any, further intervention is required
 - final meeting with key stakeholders, including as many governors as possible.

Monitoring inspection visit letters

24. Following the first monitoring inspection visit, the school will receive a brief letter containing the judgement relating to the fitness for purpose of the school’s improvement planning.
25. Subsequent monitoring inspection visit letters will contain an overarching judgement on whether *the school is making reasonable progress towards becoming a good school* or *the school is not making enough progress towards becoming a good school*. Additionally, the inspector will list strengths and weaknesses in the school’s approaches to securing improvement.
26. Monitoring inspection visit letters following the first monitoring inspection visit will not be published. Letters arising from any subsequent monitoring inspection visits will be published on the Ofsted website.
27. Where a monitoring inspection visit identifies significant concerns about aspects of the school’s performance, including about the safeguarding of pupils, that were not identified in the previous section 5 inspection or any earlier monitoring inspection visits, these must be considered by inspectors and may affect the judgement about the progress made by the school and/or subsequent inspection activity. This could lead to the section 5 inspection being brought forward.
28. The arrangements for publication are as follows.
- The lead inspector will complete the letter and report towards the end of monitoring inspection day. This will be sent to the appropriate ISP within one working day of the end of the monitoring inspection.

- The ISP will edit and send the letter to the school, normally within five working days of the end of the inspection.
 - The school has 24 hours to check and report any factual inaccuracies to the ISP.
 - The ISP will prepare a final version of the letter which will be sent to the:
 - headteacher
 - Secretary of State for Education
 - chair of the governing body or interim executive board or proprietor as appropriate
 - local authority or academy proprietor/sponsor
 - diocese, for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
 - The Education Funding Agency (EFA), for secondary schools with a sixth form
 - Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit, for academies
 - person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
 - lead inspector.
29. In the monitoring inspection visit letter, lead inspectors will make professional judgements about the extent of the detail needed to explain clearly the progress made by the school, depending on the complexity of circumstances. The content must be clear, concise and securely based on evidence. If necessary, judgements should be written to provide sufficient detail to enable the school to understand clearly what should be done next.
30. The monitoring inspection visit letter for the second and any subsequent inspections must include:
- a summary of the evidence gathered by inspectors
 - a brief summary of any significant changes to the context of the school
 - brief bullet points evaluating the progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement
 - reference to the impact that governors are having in helping the school to improve
 - reference to the quality and impact of external support.
31. It is quite likely that areas for improvement from the section 5 inspection will consist of a main stem followed by one or more subsidiary bullet points. Inspectors should write about each main area for improvement and the related bullet points as appropriate.

32. Progress made on priorities for further improvement identified in previous monitoring inspections should be reported in the text of the subsequent monitoring letter. They should not be added as bullet points in the annex alongside the original areas for improvement.
33. Completed letters and reports should be sent as one document and given the following file name: D school name, visit number (1 = first visit, 2= second...) RI (that is, D school name 2 RI) and emailed to the ISP within one working day of the end of the inspection.

Record of the inspection: the evidence base

34. Lead inspectors may retain copies of inspection evidence until the school is reinspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, but must do so in line with Ofsted's information assurance policy and procedures. Evidence forms should be sent to the ISP as soon as possible after the end of each monitoring inspection. ISPs will retain and/or destroy evidence in accordance with Ofsted's policy.

Annex A. Quality assurance

Editing monitoring inspection visit letters

35. All monitoring letters must be returned to the relevant ISP for editing. Ofsted quality assures a sample of the letters – the ISP provides Ofsted with copies of those selected.
36. The lead inspector will receive an electronic copy of the edited letter.
37. The ISP will send the letter to school within five working days of the end of the inspection for the school to carry out a factual accuracy check. These letters should be given the file name: F school name, inspection number RI . The letter is addressed to the appropriate authority via the headteacher.
38. The school will be asked to check and report any factual inaccuracies to the ISP within 24 hours of receipt of the letter.
39. The ISP will send the final letter to the school within 10 days of the end of the inspection. The letter will also be copied by the ISP to appropriate recipients as noted on the post-visit letter template.
40. The ISP will forward the letter to Ofsted for uploading onto the Ofsted website. The letter should be available on the website within 15 working days of the end of the inspection. Monitoring inspection visit letters following the first monitoring inspection visit will not be published.
41. The full timeline for writing, editing, quality assuring and publishing monitoring letters is as follows:

Day after the inspection	Activity
Day 1	Lead inspector writes letter.
Day 2	Lead inspector submits the letter to ISP by 9am.
Day 3	ISP quality assurance.
Day 4	ISP quality assurance.
Day 5	Letter to school for factual accuracy check by day 5 at the latest. This might happen earlier. If so, the school still has one working day to check factual accuracy and will, therefore, return the letter to the ISP earlier.
Day 6	Letter returned to ISP; ISP sends letter to Ofsted by 5pm.
Day 7	Ofsted quality assurance – 20% sample.
Day 8	Ofsted quality assurance – returned to ISP by 5pm.
Day 9	ISP prepares the letter to send to the school.
Day 10	ISP sends final copy of the letter to school.

Day 15	Letter to be published on the Ofsted website by day 15 but this may happen earlier.
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