

Monitoring visits and support for schools that require improvement in order to become good or outstanding

This guidance sets out Ofsted's approach to supporting and challenging schools that are judged to require improvement at a section 5 inspection. It outlines the main activities that may be undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from the time that the school is judged to require improvement until it is reinspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. This revised guidance takes effect from 20 May 2013.

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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 that require improvement in order to become good or outstanding are not 'schools causing concern', as set out in the Education Act 2005. Nonetheless, Ofsted is committed to monitoring and supporting these schools until they are judged to be good or outstanding.
2. Schools judged to require improvement will receive an initial monitoring inspection visit, usually within four to six weeks of the publication of the inspection report. This visit will be carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 by an HMI. Where leadership and management were judged to be good at the recent section 5 inspection, the school will not normally receive such a visit.
3. Following the initial monitoring visit, the HMI will recommend whether or not further monitoring visits and other activity should occur to encourage the school's improvement so that the school is judged good or outstanding at its next section 5 inspection. Where an HMI considers that a school is ready for inspection, they may recommend that the next section 5 inspection be brought forward.

Focus of the monitoring visit

4. The initial monitoring visit will focus on:
 - reviewing with the school how urgently and effectively it is acting on the key areas for improvement identified at the most recent section 5 inspection
 - examining with school leaders and governors whether the fundamental actions needed to improve the school – for example, in relation to leadership, the quality of teaching, management of teachers' performance, and governance – are being taken (pupils are unlikely to be served well by a school that has focused on peripheral matters, or only on planning, rather than directly on the core issues that need tackling before the school can be good or outstanding)
 - identifying with the school any barriers to progress towards becoming a good or outstanding school
 - reviewing the impact of any external support for the school's improvement
 - determining the nature and timing of further activity by HMI to support improvement (see annex A)
 - where applicable, recommending whether or not the school is ready for a section 5 inspection.

5. All monitoring visits comply with the code of conduct for inspectors as set out in *The framework for school inspection*.¹ However, this type of monitoring visit is not subject to the same procedures as a section 5 inspection and HMI will vary the way they work to reflect the circumstances of the school.
6. Schools judged to require improvement are not obliged 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.
7. All schools requiring improvement will be reinspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 no later than 24 months after the inspection at which the school was judged to require improvement.
8. Further general guidance and briefing papers on school inspections and other materials are available on Ofsted's [website](#).

Conducting the monitoring visit

9. The HMI will not normally be accompanied by another inspector on the visit.
10. Where a school that requires improvement has residential or boarding provision, the lead inspector should inform the senior HMI responsible for the Welfare Inspection of Boarding Schools².

Notification

11. The HMI will telephone the school up to five days before the start of the visit to ensure that members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority or other appropriate authority are available when the visit takes place.
12. If the headteacher is unavailable, the HMI should ask to speak to the next most senior member of staff and will seek to ensure that the headteacher will be in school on the day of the inspection. Once the inspection has been confirmed, the HMI will inform the inspection service provider (ISP), who will send formal confirmation of the visit to the school by email. During the initial telephone call, the HMI will:
 - confirm the date of the visit
 - make sure that the headteacher will be present on the day of the visit
 - explain the purpose of the visit and provide the opportunity to discuss any specific focus of the visit

¹ *The framework for school inspection from September 2012*, Ofsted, 2012;

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/framework-for-school-inspection-september-2012-0>.

² 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.

- confirm that the school is able to inform the governing body and the local authority/proprietor/sponsor (as relevant) about the visit and that the HMI will wish to speak to them, preferably during the visit³

13. **Requests for a deferral** will be handled in accordance with Ofsted's policy about the deferral of inspections.⁴

Monitoring visit activities

14. The HMI will arrive at the school on the day of the visit at the time agreed during the initial telephone conversation.

15. On arrival at the school, HMI will 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 inspector if they wish to do so.

16. During the visit the HMI will aim to:

- meet with the headteacher and other senior leaders to establish a working relationship and focus on the actions taken so far to tackle issues stemming from the section 5 inspection; HMI may undertake observation or other enquiries to follow up the effect of the actions; while they will consider the progress made in implementing the plan and the impact of actions, HMI are not visiting simply to evaluate action plans, but to challenge and support the school so that any necessary changes in approaches to leadership, teaching and governance occur.
- hold separate meetings with representatives of the local authority/proprietor/sponsor, and the Chair and members of the governing body, to establish what action is being taken, including the progress and impact of any review of governance
- gather any other evidence needed, which may include discussions with staff and pupils, observation of the school at work, records of teacher performance, planning and assessment, observations, work scrutiny and minutes of governing body meetings
- ask the school to encourage parents and carers to use Parent View to contribute/record their views about the school.
- discuss with the headteacher the next steps, including any possible further monitoring visits or other improvement activity
- plan time to reflect, draft the monitoring letter and consider what, if any, further challenge or support is required

³ HMI may need to explain that the visit is being carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- hold a feedback meeting with key stakeholders, including as many governors as possible; where HMI have serious concerns about the lack of urgency with which weaknesses are being tackled, they will expect to speak to the full governing body. If needed, they will make arrangements to do so after the visit.
- 17. Where a further monitoring visit is considered necessary, this will take place after a suitable interval and before the next section 5 inspection.
- 18. Where HMI have concerns about the school, its leadership and management, its governance or the lack of urgency with which weaknesses are being tackled, these will be identified clearly and specific recommendations relating to these concerns will be made by HMI.
- 19. Where a visit identifies serious concerns about aspects of the school's performance, including the safeguarding of pupils, that were not identified in the previous section 5 inspection or in any earlier monitoring visits, these will be reported to Ofsted and may lead to the next section 5 inspection being brought forward.

Reporting on the monitoring visit

- 20. The content of the letter written at the end of the visit will include:
 - the date of the visit and whether it was a first, or subsequent, visit
 - a summary of the type of evidence gathered during the visit and the context of the school
 - the relevance, urgency and any early impact of the work being done to improve the school since the recent inspection, with particular reference to the inspection findings and including, in all cases, the improvement of teaching and learning and the efficacy of school leadership and governance
 - the suitability of the school's plans to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent inspection and any recommendations from a previous monitoring visit
 - the quality and impact of any external support, and whether or not this is being brokered effectively.
- 21. The arrangements for writing the monitoring visit letter are as follows.
 - HMI will complete the letter towards the end of the monitoring visit day. This will be sent to the appropriate inspection service provider (ISP) within three days of the monitoring visit taking place.
 - HMI is responsible for the quality and accuracy of the letter.
 - Within 10 days of the end of the visit, the ISP will prepare the final version of the letter for publication, which will be submitted to Ofsted through the data exchange and sent to the headteacher and copied (as appropriate) to:

- the appropriate authority (e.g. Chair of the governing body/interim executive board)
 - the local authority (including where the school is an academy)
 - the academy chain, where relevant
 - the diocese (for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools)
 - the Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
 - the person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors, if the school has a foundation
 - the lead inspector.
22. Completed letters should be sent as one document and given the following file name: D school name, visit number (1 = first visit, 2= second visit) RI and emailed to the ISP within three working days of the end of the inspection. For example: DCoppenfields1RI.
23. Ofsted will publish this letter on its website within 15 days of the visit.

Inspection evidence

24. HMI must retain copies of inspection evidence until the school is reinspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, in line with Ofsted's information assurance policy and procedures.
25. Inspection evidence gathered during a monitoring visit will not normally be used as part of the evidence for the subsequent section 5 inspection. However, where a section 5 inspection is carried out because of serious concerns raised during a visit about the quality of education provided, HMI may use the evidence gathered during the visit. In such a case, the extent of any use will be made clear to those responsible for leading the school.

Evaluation of the arrangements (Summer term only)

26. During the summer term 2013, senior HMI may make contact with the headteacher/governing body and/or other appropriate authority in a sample of those schools visited in the autumn term. The purpose of the contact is to ascertain their views about the impact of these visits in promoting improvement. This feedback will be taken account of in any revision to this guidance.

Annex A. Strategies for further challenge and support

Ofsted's general duty to promote improvement

1. Ofsted has a range of duties under s117 (1) Education and Inspections Act 2006. One of these is to perform its functions for the general purpose of encouraging improvement in the services it inspects and regulates. Inspection and regulation are the principal ways of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the quality of provision and promoting improvement. However, additional monitoring and support are being introduced for those schools that require improvement.
2. HMI will make an initial visit to schools that require improvement and where leadership and management are neither good nor outstanding, to provide support and challenge in making the progress necessary to be judged good or outstanding at their next section 5 inspection.
3. The arrangements for the monitoring visits are set out in the guidance above. A key element of these visits is the careful consideration of what further measures are needed to help the school improve, including initiatives led or arranged by HMI.
4. HMI may make further monitoring inspection visits to the school⁵ if they have concerns about the rate at which the school is improving. Such visits will result in published letters. HMI may also visit the school to assist in its improvement⁶, in which circumstances, any letter is not published.

Considering what further improvement activity will take place

5. During the visit, the HMI will consider what further actions are needed to ensure that the school makes the progress necessary for it to be judged at least good at its next section 5 inspection. In some circumstances, for example, where the HMI and the school are of the opinion that the school would benefit from substantial involvement of Ofsted staff, the HMI will discuss next steps and further actions with senior managers at Ofsted before confirming these to the school.

Strategies for support and challenge to schools

6. The following is an indicative range of challenge and support strategies that HMI may choose to employ and recommend when visiting a school or subsequently. The strategies are not mutually exclusive and the list is not exhaustive. HMI may recommend other activities that suit the specific circumstances of the school. HMI will be expected to use their time and available resources flexibly when supporting and challenging schools to

⁵ Under section 8

⁶

improve the quality of education they provide before their next section 5 inspection.

7. Following the initial monitoring visit, and taking account of the local circumstances of the school and the support available to it, HMI may recommend one or more of the following:
 - an invitation to school leaders to attend (if they have not already attended) an Ofsted improvement seminar covering the range of common weaknesses as reflected in inspection evidence; seminar topics are likely to include improving the quality of teaching, performance management, governance, and assessment and planning to meet the needs of all pupils
 - attending a governors' meeting to explain, using Ofsted evidence, how governors can assist in moving their school from 'requires improvement' to good
 - a meeting with local or other relevant authorities to discuss the school's rate of improvement
 - establishing stronger links, and brokering such links, with other local schools to learn from their strengths, as well as to work together on shared issues
 - offering to arrange a visit for senior leaders and governors to another school, locally or otherwise
 - establishing links with the National College, for example to access support for the leadership of teaching, improving or reviewing governance and developing middle leaders and managers
 - accessing existing local and regional networks and support such as National Leaders of Education, Local Leaders of Education and Specialist Leaders of Education
 - linking the school with the School Governors' One Stop Shop (SGOSS) contact, if the school is encountering difficulties in filling governor vacancies <http://www.sgoss.org.uk/>
 - inviting school leaders to attend a specific subject or aspect best practice seminar led by HMI, drawing on Ofsted evidence, such as improving teaching and outcomes for pupils in mathematics and English
 - returning for a further one-day monitoring visit with a specific focus
 - visiting the school briefly to meet with the headteacher and check progress
 - meeting with other staff, or groups of staff, in the school to review progress against agreed action plans and to share good practice
 - meeting middle leaders and managers in the school to discuss how teaching can be strengthened
 - jointly observing a particular subject or aspect with senior or middle leaders
 - visiting the school to assess levels of pupils' progress by carrying out scrutiny of their work

- arranging a subject inspection visit.
8. Not all these activities will require a full day visit to a school and some may need to take place after the end of the school day. In some circumstances, the HMI may contact the school by telephone to discuss progress against a particular recommendation or to ask about the progress being made overall. Where a full-day monitoring visit does not take place, HMI will not normally report their findings in a monitoring letter but will prepare a briefing for the relevant Senior HMI and/or Regional Director as required.⁷
 9. All schools have a responsibility for ensuring that they provide at least a good standard of education for their pupils. The headteacher, other senior leaders, the governing body and other appropriate authorities, must determine the exact actions to take to improve the school and how to access any necessary support. However, HMI will support the school in this process.
 10. HMI will ensure that the school understands how to access external support locally and that there are suitable arrangements for coordinating support. Where the school is not drawing appropriately on external support or this is not securing improvement in pupils' progress, HMI will report on such weaknesses to the school and discuss ways in which they might be overcome.
 11. Where necessary, HMI will raise concerns about the progress of a school or concerns about the impact of the support being provided with the local authority, governing body or other appropriate authority responsible for the school.
 12. Senior HMI from Ofsted will liaise regularly with the National College of Teaching and Leadership, local authorities and other appropriate authorities to discuss ways in which greater improvement can be secured for schools or groups of schools.

Evaluation of these arrangements (summer term only)

13. During the summer 2013, Senior HMI will make contact with the headteacher/governing body and/or other appropriate authority in a sample of those schools visited in the spring term. The purpose of the contact is to ascertain their views about how effective this further activity has been in promoting improvement. This feedback will be taken account of in any revision to this guidance.

⁷ In these circumstances, the monitoring activity will not take place under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005.