

Deferral policy for inspections of independent day, boarding and residential special schools

This document sets out Ofsted's policy for determining that an inspection of an independent school should not go ahead on the planned dates. It applies to: inspections of schools' education provision; inspections of boarding or residential provision in schools; and integrated inspections of education and boarding or residential provision.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that decisions about the deferral, cancellation and rescheduling of inspections are taken consistently throughout the country. The policy does not apply to decisions to reschedule the start date of an inspection within five working days.

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Deferral of independent school inspections

There are a limited number of circumstances in which a decision can be taken that an inspection should not go ahead on the planned dates. It applies to: inspections of schools' education provision; inspections of boarding or residential provision in schools; and integrated inspections of education and boarding or residential provision. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that decisions about the deferral, cancellation and rescheduling of inspections are taken consistently throughout the country. The policy does not apply to decisions to reschedule the start date of an inspection within five working days.

Ofsted's policy is that deferral or cancellation should only be granted in the following circumstances.

- The headteacher, the proprietor or a member of the school's senior management team is subject to a current police investigation which would be compromised by an investigation of the school.
- The school has experienced a recent major incident, such as a fatal accident to a pupil or member of staff.
- The school has made an application to the Independent Schools Council for membership within that academic year and an accreditation inspection by the Independent Schools Inspectorate is confirmed by that body as appearing on their programme for inspection.
- The school is due to close and has informed the Registering Authority – the Department for Education (DfE) – of this in writing so that the Secretary of State considers that no useful purpose will be served in inspecting it. This should normally only apply when the date of closure is within six months of the inspection. On some occasions schools that are due to close may still be inspected.
- There are fewer than five pupils of compulsory school age on the roll of the school at the time of inspection, or, if there are between one and four registered pupils, none of these is in public care or has a statement of special educational need. Under these circumstances the school does not fulfil the requirements for registration as an independent school. Where there are insufficient pupils of compulsory school age on roll, but there are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the inspection will be deferred to a later stage in the academic year until there are sufficient pupils of compulsory school age to conduct an inspection. If this does not occur the school's registration will be pursued by the DfE as a result of which the provision could be re-scheduled for inspection as a private provider of nursery education. Where an integrated inspection is due but the education part is deferred because there are insufficient pupils on roll, the welfare inspection will still proceed as planned. An integrated inspection will be scheduled at the next opportunity.

- HMCI agrees that the inspection is likely to cause significant disruption to the provision of education or distress to many pupils within the school.
- The school is closed to all pupils – for example, owing to a staff training day or adverse weather conditions – for at least half of the period for which the inspection has been scheduled.
- At least three quarters of the pupils will not be at school – for example, owing to a school trip or a religious festival – for at least half of the period for which the inspection has been scheduled.
- The school has very recently converted to become an academy school – in such circumstances HMCI reserves the right to schedule the academy's first inspection at a later date.
- There are other exceptional circumstances which, in the judgement of the regional director, justify deferral or cancellation of the inspection. These will be considered on a case by case basis. The nature of such circumstances should be recorded fully.
- In the case of illness or death of the headteacher, professional judgement will be exercised by the regional director.
- Also in the case of unavoidable absence of the headteacher and proprietor where this person is the only full-time teacher in the school, professional judgement will be exercised by the regional director.

Where the inspection of a school has been previously deferred on two consecutive occasions because there were no pupils on roll, the inspection will not be deferred for a third time. The purpose of the inspection will be to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards required for continued registration. Inspectors will still make qualitative judgements about the effectiveness of the school, and will comment on the extent to which it is ready to educate and safeguard pupils.

In the event of an application to defer a planned inspection on the grounds that the headteacher is out of school, other than in the exceptional circumstances cited above, Ofsted requires that the inspection proceed on the basis that the pupils at the school are still receiving education.

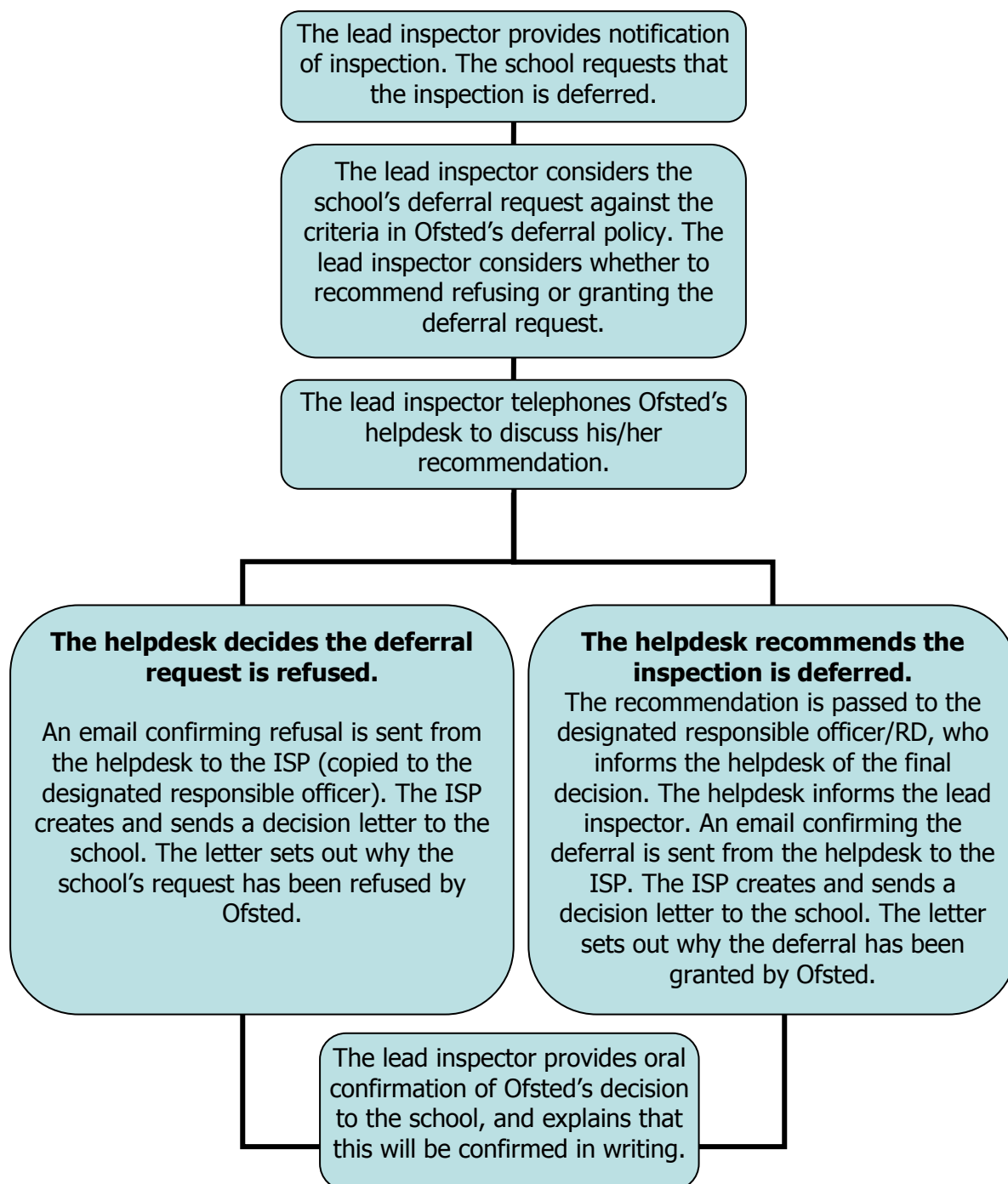
Where an application is made more than once for a deferral, professional judgement will be exercised by the regional director.

Building work will not be a reason for deferral if pupils are in the school.

Subject to the discretion of the regional director, the criteria for deferral and cancellation should also be applied to decisions to re-schedule or to accept scheduling requests.

Deferral process

The chart below is the process followed by lead inspectors. References to 'ISPs' refer to Ofsted's inspection service providers, who administer and conduct inspections on behalf of Ofsted.



If a school cannot be contacted by the lead inspector

In exceptional circumstances, it may prove difficult for the lead inspector to make contact with the school. If the lead inspector has not managed to make contact by 10am of the first day of the inspection, they will contact Ofsted's helpdesk to discuss the situation. Normally, the helpdesk will advise that the inspection will continue and that the inspection service provider should continue to try and make contact with the school, while the lead inspector travels to the school. If there continues to be no answer, the inspection will be undertaken as an unannounced inspection.