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Official Statistics

# Methodology: state-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 March 2020

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## Introduction

This document contains methodology and quality information relevant to our official statistics release of state-funded school inspections and outcomes data, which we publish 3 times per year.

This official statistics release reports on the outcomes of state-funded schools inspections that were carried out within the most recent reporting period. This release also includes the most recent inspection outcome of all open schools as at the end of the reporting period, including those schools that we have yet to inspect for the first time. If an open school has not yet been inspected, we will include the inspection outcome of its predecessor school predecessor to give a more comprehensive view of the sector. This release covers all state-funded schools within England.

## Quality

This section is broken down by the 5 dimensions to statistical output quality in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics:

- relevance
- coherence and comparability
- accuracy and reliability
- timeliness and punctuality
- accessibility and clarity

There is also additional information on meeting user needs.

### Relevance

Information in this release has 5 distinct purposes:

- it allows media outlets to use our key findings to inform the public about the quality of schools across the country and in particular local areas
- it allows users to track movement in the education sector and monitor the quality of provision available at a national and local level and across provider types
- it gives an accurate picture of the provision, which influences policy decisions about the location and quality of school provision
- it helps identify areas of weak performance, which informs policy development within the Department for Education (DfE), local authorities and multi-academy trusts to address issues and implement strategies to mitigate them
- within Ofsted, inspection profiles inform inspection framework development and underpin policies to improve standards; also, the key messages within the official statistics contribute towards the findings in our Annual Report to Parliament

The data included in the release is generated by our regulation and inspection process and is therefore administrative data.

### Assessment of users' needs and perceptions

These official statistics are regularly reviewed to ensure that they meet users' needs. This has included running several public consultations in the last few years.

In November 2017, we consulted on proposals to change the way we compile data on schools' most recent inspections. Respondents supported these proposals. Based on these findings, we made all of the changes proposed as part of the consultation. We applied these for the first time in the official statistics published in June 2018.

Previously, in August 2015, we also published the results of an earlier consultation on this official statistics release. You can read documents relating to this consultation, which include a list of resulting changes.

Since the 2015 consultation, we have added a small number of additional tables and fields to the release to reflect the changes made to inspections in September 2015. These provide information on section 8 inspections of good and non-exempt outstanding schools as well as the new judgements introduced as part of the common inspection framework.

We welcome feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, contact the Schools Data and Analysis team.

## Coherence and comparability

The tables and charts within the release compare inspection outcomes over the past several years. These tables and charts have all been updated to reflect the changes, since June 2018, to the way we compile data on most recent inspection outcomes.

There have also been a number of framework changes since the first release of statistics and these have been reflected in the publications.

The overall effectiveness judgement has remained broadly comparable across the different frameworks since 2005. Other judgements are, when possible, mapped across frameworks when changes occur. We explain this in more detail in the frameworks section.

When these changes have occurred, users have been alerted via updates in the official statistics introduction and methodology sections of the key findings document. When changes to inspection frameworks or methodological changes have been implemented to improve the output, we have added guidance footnotes and the key findings document for easy access.

If inspection reports are published after the final publication date included within a release, we will reflect the inspection outcomes within the next provisional official statistics release.

Some policies within Ofsted and the DfE impact on the comparability of different school types with each other and with schools as a whole. Comparisons between school types should be treated with caution due to the variation in the number of schools included in the different categories.

### Other sources of similar data

There is no comparable data published by other producers of official or national statistics for school inspections in England.

For the devolved nations, inspection is carried out and reviews and reports are published by the following:

- for Scotland, Education Scotland
- for Wales, Estyn
- for Northern Ireland, Education and Training Inspectorate

We also produce monthly management information on the outcomes of school inspections and a quarterly interactive web tool called Data View. At present, the methodology used to produce all 3 releases is the same.

Several third parties provide interactive tools displaying publicly available Ofsted inspection judgements. These appear to be collated by using advanced computer techniques to harvest information from published inspection reports. We cannot comment on the quality of these datasets.

### Changes to inspection frameworks

We introduced the education inspection framework (EIF) in September 2019 following a consultation.

The impact of the changes to the EIF judgements are as follows:

- overall effectiveness: this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date
- effectiveness of leadership and management: this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date
- quality of education: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement (personal development, behaviour and welfare) will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally
- behaviour and attitudes: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement (personal development, behaviour and welfare) will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally
- personal development: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement (personal development, behaviour and welfare) will only represent inspections since September 2015 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally
- early years provision (if applicable): this judgement is broadly comparable since September 2005 to date, with the exception of 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years when, due to legislation changes, the judgement was not made at inspections. Since September 2015, nursery schools have not received a separate early years judgement
- sixth form provision (if applicable): this judgement is broadly comparable since September 2005 to date. However, this judgement was not reported in 2012/13 and 2013/14 due to changes in legislation. Between 2005 and 2012, the judgement was made under the 'overall effectiveness of the sixth form' judgement, which was replaced by the 16 to 19 study programme judgement in September 2005. This was replaced by sixth form provision (if applicable) from September 2019

## The selection process

Schools are not inspected with equal regularity. Ofsted must inspect all schools to which section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) applies, within prescribed intervals.

The result of this is that the schools inspected in a particular academic year are unlikely to be representative of schools as a whole. This may also affect the comparability of school inspection outcomes between years. This is as a result of the following selection rules.

### Selection rules

We inspect schools that were previously judged to be less than good in their most recent inspections more frequently than good schools.

As of September 2015, good schools received a section 8 inspection approximately every 3 years. As of April 2018, this was changed to approximately every 4 years.

Before September 2015, all good schools received a section 5 inspection no later than the fifth academic year since their last inspection, including in cases when they continued to provide the same standard of education. Therefore, users should be particularly cautious if comparing outcomes from 2015/16 or later with previous years.

Primary and secondary schools previously judged to be outstanding in their most recent inspection are exempt from routine inspection and will not be inspected unless we have concerns about them. This can include concerns identified through risk assessment, a complaint, a serious safeguarding incident or concerns about the standards of leadership and management.

Outstanding special schools, nursery schools and pupil referral units are not exempt from routine inspection. These schools receive a section 8 inspection in the same way that all good primary and secondary schools do.

New schools are usually inspected according to a fixed cycle, so in the majority of cases the timing of this inspection is not determined by performance data of the school.

The exact timing of a schools' next inspection can also vary depending on the outcomes of a data-based risk assessment process, and a desk-based review of other information by a senior HMI in one of Ofsted's regional teams.

### The comparability of data on the most recent inspection outcomes for all schools

The official statistics include analysis of the most recent inspection outcomes of all open schools (based on nearly 22,000 schools nationally). This analysis is often summarised as the percentage of schools judged good or outstanding at the end of each academic year. This statistic is used by us and others to try to measure the quality of the school sector over time.

The comparability of this statistic is affected by a number of the factors discussed previously in this document and should therefore be used with caution.

## Comparability factors

**Changes to inspection frameworks over time:** The overall effectiveness judgement is intended to be broadly comparable since section 5 inspections began in 2005. There may have been some fluctuations over time in where the bar is set between 'good' and 'requires improvement'/'satisfactory'. However, we do not believe there has been a substantial lowering of this bar since 2010 that would account for the substantial rise in the proportion of schools judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection since that time.

**The government's exemption from routine inspection for primary and secondary schools judged to be outstanding.** A small proportion of schools have now not had a section 5 inspection for over 10 years. There is a risk that this could inflate the proportion of schools that are graded outstanding because schools become outstanding and may not be inspected again. However, we carry out a risk assessment on exempt schools every year, and still inspect these schools if we have cause for concern. From 2018/19 onwards, we planned to inspect 10% of exempt schools each year.

**The different lengths of time between inspections for schools of each grade.** This means that schools that are less than good are usually inspected more frequently than other schools. The impact of this is most clearly seen when users of our data try to compare inspections that take place in individual academic years. The inspections carried out in any single year are not designed to be representative of all schools nationally and the mix of grades is usually lower than that seen across all schools at their most recent inspection. Schools are risk assessed regularly, and we can bring inspections forward at any time if we have concerns about a school.

**The changes to section 8 inspections of good and non-exempt outstanding schools introduced in January 2018.** These section 8 inspections now only convert to a section 5 inspection if there are concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education. Far fewer section 8 inspections have converted to a section 5 inspection since this change. This policy change means that some schools are still classed as good or outstanding in our data, whereas under the previous policy the inspections may have converted and some of these schools may have then been judged to have a lower grade. However, in our estimation, the impact of this change on the proportion of 'good' and 'outstanding' schools nationally is fairly minor at the current time.

### Accuracy and reliability

We extract inspections outcome data from our administrative systems. The lead inspector enters inspection outcomes onto our systems by the lead inspector. As inspection reports undergo a quality assurance process, any errors are likely to be identified at this stage. In addition, we check a sample of the entries made onto our administrative system to ensure that these match the inspection report. There is a focus on checking those entries where the risk of error is highest. An example of this is when the inspection outcome awarded changes during the quality assurance process. There remains a small chance that some outcomes are entered incorrectly onto our systems.

We moderate all inspection reports when a school is judged to be inadequate. This may result in some inspection reports being published after the publication cut-off date required for inclusion within the provisional release. Therefore, provisional statistics are likely to under-represent schools being placed in a category of concern. In addition, when there are concerns that further evidence may be required to secure the inspection evidence base, this will delay publication of an inspection report.

We publish revisions to the data in line with our revisions policy for official statistics.

**Technical production**

Technical production of the official statistics publication may also result in manual errors. We use a rigorous data quality assurance procedure, with the aim of minimising the risk of reporting error. If an error is discovered within the document, we place a note on the website and upload a corrected version of the document as soon as possible.

Read more information on issues relating to the use of administrative data.

**Data obtained from other sources**

We get data indicating whether schools are opened or closed, their type and phase of education and any links to predecessor schools from the DfE's get information about schools (GIAS) database, formerly called Edubase.

The quality of data relating to school opening and closures is considered to be good. Changes that occur because of schools converting to academy status, re-brokering between academy trusts or closing to become sponsor-led academies are managed centrally by the DfE's Academies Operations and Strategies team. The process for changes undergoes monthly reconciliation checks against other data systems within the DfE. Some issues have been identified around the closure, merger and amalgamation of local authority-maintained schools. Local authorities do not always inform the DfE of these changes, and therefore these are sometimes identified after the event. These discrepancies are usually identified as part of checks built into other processes.

Official statistics published since April 2016 use GIAS data for all charts and tables. Data obtained from GIAS on the type of education is considered to be of good quality. Any change to the type of education requires verification from the DfE. The phase of education is not subject to the same verification. Local authority-maintained schools have some remit to change their age range through a local process. Errors are picked up as part of the DfE's performance table validation process, but this may be after the event. The DfE requires schools to update their records every 90 days.

## Timeliness and punctuality

Data is currently published 3 times a year and includes details of inspections that have taken place and been published in the relevant period. To ensure that data is as timely as possible, each release includes the most recent possible full month of inspections.

We publish data at 9:30am on the date pre-announced in the publication schedule.

You can also find information on any delay in publication on the publication schedule.

We allow 1 calendar month after the end of the reporting period as the cut-off date for the inclusion of published inspection reports. For instance, when an inspection would have to have been completed by the end of March, the report would have to have been published by the end of April. This is to allow time for most of the relevant reports to have been published. We do not usually publish inspection reports during school holidays, so the timing of school holidays can affect the proportion of reports that are published by the cut-off date for the statistics.

The average production time for this official statistics release is approximately 6 weeks. This time includes obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and uploading the information onto GOV.UK.

We announce publications on our social media channels. We give pre-release access in accordance with the pre-release to official statistics order (2008).

You can find the list of post holders granted pre-release access as a separate document accompanying each release.

## Accessibility and clarity

We publish our releases in an accessible format on GOV.UK. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data. Each release includes outcomes from inspections that have subsequently been published. The data is aimed at keeping users informed of the progress of the inspection framework and of changes in the state-funded schools sector.

Supporting underlying data in an accessible format accompanies each release to allow users to perform their own analysis. Users may use and re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

### Performance, cost and burden on respondents

There is no burden on respondents in relation to this statistics release because data is a by-product of Ofsted's inspection process. The only cost involved is the internal resource involved in collating the release.

### Confidentiality, transparency and security

When we hold sensitive or personal data, the disclosure control processes we have in place ensure that this data is not published.

All data releases follow our confidentiality and revisions policies.

# Methodology

Data in this official statistics series is from inspections carried out under sections 5 and 8 of the Education Act 2005. You can find further detail on the dates of inspections included within the release. If an inspection report is not published by the cut-off date given in the release, then the previous inspection will be reported as a school's most recent inspection where applicable.

We will present and analyse the data in 2 ways:

- inspections that have occurred within the academic year being reported when published by the given date
- the most recent inspection outcome of all open schools as at the end of the reporting period, including those schools that we have yet to inspect for the first time; when an open school has not yet been inspected, we will include the inspection outcome of its predecessor school to give a more comprehensive view of the sector

For official statistics, we collect data on inspection outcomes 1 month after the end of the reporting period. This helps to ensure that the vast majority of inspections carried out within the reporting period have reports that are published and are reflected within the official statistics. We do this to minimise bias. For instance, inspection reports of those schools judged inadequate undergo additional moderation checks and may otherwise miss a shorter reporting period.

Under exceptional circumstances, we may withhold/withdraw publication of an inspection report. Outcomes of withheld/withdrawn inspection reports are not included in any of the datasets. If this is the case, these are highlighted with footnotes throughout the report.

Warning notice data is included in the school-level data for any local authority-maintained school receiving a warning notice from a local authority and for any academy receiving a warning notice from the Secretary of State for Education during the academic year being reported on. Pre-warning notices given to academies are not included. Any warning notices given by local authorities that are currently under appeal or have been withdrawn have not been included.

## Section 8 inspections of good and non-exempt outstanding schools

In September 2015, we introduced section 8 inspections of good and non-exempt outstanding schools. When a section 8 inspection converts to a section 5 inspection, the outcome is reported within the outcomes for section 5 inspections. We have also added additional tables to the release to show the volumes of section 8 inspections of good and non-exempt outstanding schools, the proportion that converted to section 5 inspections, and the resulting inspection outcomes. When a school remains the same grade, for transparency, we also include all section 8 inspections that did not convert, as they have confirmed the grade of the previous section 5 inspection.

When statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have declined or improved, they refer to the most recent inspection outcome compared to those of the previous inspection outcome. When a school has not been inspected in its current form, the most recent inspection (and the previous inspection outcome) will relate to the predecessor school.

Following a change to Ofsted's policy in January 2018, these section 8 inspections only convert to a section 5 inspection if there are concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education. If the inspector feels the school may be declining but does not convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection, then the outcome for the inspection is that the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Far fewer section 8 inspections of previously good and outstanding schools have converted to a section 5 inspection since this change.

### Data View

Data in this release is also used to update Data View an interactive Ofsted web tool.

We include schools within most recent inspection outcomes if they were open on the final day of the reporting period, or if they closed on that day and we have inspected them or their predecessor school.

### Phases of education

Ofsted reports on various phases of education, which include different types of establishment.

When early years provision is governed by the school or it provides care for children aged 2 or over, we inspect it as part of the section 5 inspection and include the outcomes in the schools statistical release. Early years provision that cares for children aged under 2 needs to be registered on the Early Years Register and will have an early years inspection. We report on these outcomes under our early years official statistics.

We inspect the welfare provision for boarding and residential special schools at the same time as the section 5 inspection of education provision, when possible.

Inspections of this type are referred to as integrated inspections. We publish the outcomes of the inspection of the welfare provision in a separate inspection report from the outcomes of the inspection of the education in the school.

## Glossary

Definitions of terms are within the statistical glossary

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### Departments and policy

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