



Guidance Assurance visits: residential provision of further education colleges

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Introduction

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020.

As part of a [phased return to routine inspection](#), we are carrying out assurance visits to as many settings that are inspected under the [social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\)](#) as possible during the current inspection year (which ends on 31 March 2021).

We will prioritise visits based on the most recent inspection judgements, other information we hold about the provider, the amount of time since the last inspection and whether the provider is newly registered and therefore has not yet been inspected.

We will take into account the date when the college re-opened when deciding whether or not to carry out an assurance visit.

This guidance is applicable from 1 September 2020.

Guiding principles

Inspectors will be sensitive to the challenges presented by COVID-19; we will always take that context into account.

We will prioritise the safety and welfare of everyone involved in the visits, including children, carers, staff and inspectors; we will follow the most up-to-date guidance from Public Health England.

We continue to be guided by [existing principles for inspection as set out in the SCCIF](#).

The legal context

Under the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), Ofsted carries out its work in ways that encourage the services it inspects and/or regulates to:

- improve
- be user-focused
- be efficient and effective in the use of resources

Section 87 of the Children Act 1989 and the [National Care Standards Commission \(Inspection of schools and colleges\) regulations 2002](#) set out the legal basis for the inspection of residential provision in further education colleges.

Ofsted does not regulate residential provision in FE colleges. Further information about the legal context of our inspection and regulatory activity can be found in the relevant section of the [SCCIF](#).

Length of visit

The usual length of an assurance visit is 2 days for one inspector. This includes all off-site and on-site activity. A regional inspection manager (RIM) may agree that this can be reduced for assurance visits to small colleges or increased for visits to larger colleges.

Timeframe

The usual timeframe from the announcement of the visit to publication:

Day	What happens
Day 1	Visit announced and is 'live' immediately
Day 2	Visit completed and verbal feedback given
Day 3	Draft report completed and submitted for quality assurance
Day 4 onwards	Report sent to the college for any comments within 18 working days of the end of the visit
	The college returns the report within 5 working days with any comments
	Provider may submit a formal complaint within 5 working days of the issue of the final report
	Ofsted sends the final report to the college within 30 working days of the end of visit
	The final report is published on the Ofsted reports website within 38 working days of the end of the visit

The focus of assurance visits

Inspectors will use the following descriptors as the benchmarks against which to evaluate performance. Our findings, however, are not derived from a checklist. Some criteria will have less relevance than others depending on the nature of the setting and the needs of the young people.

Inspectors will look for evidence of the following.

Young people are well cared for

- Young people have trusted and secure relationships with staff.
- Young people are supported to keep in touch with family, friends and other people who are important to them.
- Young people's views are understood and taken into account and their rights and entitlements are met.
- Young people's social, physical, emotional and mental health needs are well understood and effectively promoted.
- Young people's educational needs are identified and promoted effectively.
- Young people have access to specialist help according to their individual needs.

Young people are safe

- Risks are identified, understood and managed effectively; specialist colleges contribute effectively to assessment reviews of children's Education, Health and Care Plans
- Staff are well prepared and supported to respond appropriately to young people who may go missing or may be at risk of harm
- Staff are well prepared and supported to manage challenging situations and behaviour effectively.
- Clear and consistent boundaries contribute to a feeling of well-being and security for young people.
- Staff understand the potential impact of abuse and neglect, and respond appropriately.

Leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership

- The college places the well-being of individual young people at the centre of its practice, however complex their needs may be.
- Decisions to divert from usual practice during the COVID-19 outbreak are made in the best interests of individual young people, appropriately overseen by senior leaders and managers and recorded effectively.
- Plans for young people are reviewed effectively and meet their individual needs; as restrictions change, plans are coherent and effective.
- Leaders and managers actively use the findings from internal monitoring to improve the experiences of young people.
- Positive partnerships are in place, for example with police and the local community.
- Robust action is taken to address complaints or issues of concern.
- The staff team works collaboratively to provide consistency and stability for young people.
- Staff and managers receive strong, individualised support, including effective training and supervision.
- Leaders and managers ensure that there are sufficient staff to meet young people's individual needs.
- Leaders and managers have responded effectively to the recommendations made at the college's last inspection.

What happens during an assurance visit

The start of the visit

The inspector contacts the college at approximately 9am on day 1 to announce beginning of the assurance visit. The visit is 'live' from the point of this call.

The inspector will always speak to the college principal or the head of residential provision at the beginning of the visit to:

- outline the plan for the visit
- arrange to interview the principal and/or the head of residential provision during the visit
- provide the opportunity to share any current information or personal issues relating to any of the young people or staff that the inspector needs to be aware of during the inspection – in particular, the inspector should find out whether any staff or young people have been diagnosed with, or have symptoms of, COVID-19
- ensure that Ofsted holds the correct details on the inspection database, including email address and contact telephone numbers for the principal
- arrange the approximate time when the inspector is likely to arrive on site and when verbal feedback will be given

The inspector will request a completed Annex A form to be shared by 2pm on the day of the announcement.

Following this call, the inspector will send the provider an email letter that confirms the practical arrangements for the visit and the information requirements.

The inspector will also share an email for the college to circulate to parents, informing them that the visit is being carried out and how they can give their views to the inspector.

There is likely to be a mixture of off-site and on-site activity. We expect that there will always be some on-site activity during visits to further education colleges.

The timing and the proportion of off-site and on-site activity are determined by the developing lines of enquiry and by the information we already hold about the college, including:

- serious inspection report(s)
- completed questionnaires from young people and parents

In exceptional circumstances (for example, if we have serious concerns about the immediate safety of children), we will arrive on site to announce the beginning of the assurance visit.

Case sampling

Evaluating the experiences of young people at the college is a core activity during the visit. This is largely based on evidence from case sampling. The detail of the inspector's activity will vary according to the lines of enquiry for each individual visit but is likely to include a combination of the following:

- listening and talking to and young people
- listening and talking to leaders and staff
- observing activities, including the interaction between staff and young people
- gathering views of other professionals (as appropriate)
- examining records, policies and procedures when this is a key line of enquiry; during the visit, inspectors will look at documents in order to follow a line of enquiry

The end of the visit

Feedback

At the end of the visit, the inspector will give verbal feedback of the main findings. This feedback will usually be given to the principal and/or head of residential provision.

Reporting our findings

Assurance visits will lead to a concise narrative report, with no graded judgement.

Each report will clearly state whether inspectors identified any serious or widespread concerns as a result of practice that:

- places young people at risk of inadequate protection or significant harm
- leads to young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted

The report will clearly identify and describe any serious or widespread concerns. It will make recommendations for improvement, as necessary.

The report will be published on Ofsted's [reports website](#).

Summary report for children

Inspectors also complete a brief summary following every assurance visit. If we know that young people need an adapted form of summary, we will send the report to the provider with a request for the document to be adapted into a suitable format.

If we know that young people use individual, alternative systems of communication to verbal communication, or that young people have limited receptive and expressive language skills, we will provide a summary. It can be short, include pictures and be set in simple, concrete sentences.

We anticipate that the college will translate the summary, if necessary, for those who speak English as an additional language and for those who use alternative systems of communication.

Serious and widespread concerns: next steps

Any serious or widespread concerns will lead to a post-visit debrief between the inspector and their manager as soon as possible, followed by a case review. The timing of the case review should be proportionate to the risk and certainly no later than 5 working days following the visit.

The post-visit debrief should consider the evidence and consider a recommendation for further action to take to the case review. The recommendation of further action should address the scheduling of future inspections/visits.

The case review considers the recommended future action and allows the manager to decide which action to take.

The inspector must notify all relevant parties (including the director of children's services of the authority where the college is based, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, local authorities that have funded placements, and parents) of the concerns that have been identified. The steps taken to notify relevant parties should follow the existing [SCCIF guidance](#) on the action taken following an inadequate inspection judgement.

If concerns are serious, we are likely to return to carry out a monitoring visit within 6 months to check that the college has taken sufficient steps to safeguard and protect the welfare of young people. All monitoring visits result in a published report.

Post-visit surveys

Following visits, we will ask providers for feedback about the process through a survey. We use the feedback we receive to review and make improvements to how we work.

Further guidance

- [Deferring inspections](#)
- [Incomplete visits](#)
- [Conduct during visits](#)
- [Concerns and complaints about a visit](#)
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