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Guidance

Education inspection framework

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Introduction

The education inspection framework ('the framework') sets out how Ofsted inspects maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools, further education and skills provision and registered early years settings in England.

The framework has been devised by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for use from September 2019. It sets out the principles that apply to inspection, and the main judgements that inspectors make when carrying out inspections of maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools, further education and skills providers and registered early years settings in England (for a full list, see 'provision inspected under the framework').

The framework applies to the inspection of different education, skills and early years settings to ensure comparability when learners move from one setting to another. It supports consistency across the inspection of different remits.

Note that we use the term 'learners' throughout for brevity; this should be read as all those attending education, skills and registered early years settings.

The framework reflects relevant legislation for each type of setting. These inspections are carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended); the Education and Inspections Act 2006; section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008; The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014; and the Childcare Act 2006. All inspections carried out using the framework will meet relevant legislative requirements.

The framework is accompanied by an inspection handbook for each of the 4 remits:

- registered early years provision
- maintained schools and academies
- non-association independent schools
- further education and skills

These handbooks set out how inspectors will make each of the inspection judgements. They reflect the needs and expectations of different phases and the differences between various age groups. Inspectors will inspect types of provision for which they have appropriate expertise and training.

Principles of inspection and regulation

We are required to carry out our work in ways that encourage the services we inspect and regulate to improve, to be user-focused and to be efficient and effective in their use of resources, as set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Inspection provides independent, external evaluation and identifies what needs to improve in order for provision to be good or better. It is based on gathering a range of evidence that is evaluated against an inspection framework and takes full account of our policies and relevant legislation in areas such as safeguarding, equality and diversity.

Inspection provides important information to parents, carers, learners and employers about the quality of education, training and care. These groups should be able to make informed choices based on the information published in inspection reports.

The framework sets out the judgements that apply to all education, skills and early years provision. These are underpinned by consistent, researched criteria for reaching those judgements. Inspectors will take comparable approaches to gathering evidence in different settings, although there may be some variation, for example depending on the age of learners and the type of provision. Inspectors will comply with relevant guidance and codes of conduct, such as the Home Office guidance 'Powers of entry: code of practice', but they will always try to be curious.

Inspection provides assurance to the public and to government that minimum standards of education, skills and childcare are being met; that – where relevant – public money is being spent well; and that arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A force for improvement

Ofsted exists to be a force for improvement through intelligent, responsible and focused inspection and regulation. This is our guiding principle. The primary purpose of inspection under this framework is to bring about improvement in education provision. For more information, see 'Ofsted's strategy: 2017 to 2022'.

Through the use of evidence, research and inspector training, we ensure that our judgements are as valid and reliable as they can be. These judgements focus on key strengths, from which other providers can learn intelligently, and areas of weakness, from which the provider should seek to improve. Our inspections act as a trigger to others to take action.

Helping to protect learners

Inspectors will always take into account how well learners are helped and protected so that they are kept safe. Although inspectors will not provide a separate numerical grade for this important aspect of a provider's work, they will always make a written judgement under 'leadership and management' about whether the arrangements for safeguarding learners are effective.

'Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings' sets out the approach inspectors should take to inspecting safeguarding in all the settings covered by the framework. It should be read alongside the framework and handbooks.

Inspectors are also required to be familiar with the statutory guidance about safeguarding. They should take this into account when inspecting:

- 'Keeping children safe in education: statutory guidance for schools and colleges on safeguarding children and safer recruitment'
- 'Working together to safeguard children'

The Equality Act 2010

The framework is intended to be a force for improvement for all learners. The framework and remit-specific criteria are clear that the expectation is that all learners will receive a high-quality, ambitious education.

Inspectors will assess the extent to which the provider complies with the relevant legal duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010 including, where relevant, the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Expectations of inspectors

It is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a positive working relationship based on courteous and professional behaviour. We expect our inspectors to uphold the highest professional standards in their work, and to treat everyone they meet during inspections fairly and with respect and sensitivity.

In meeting this expectation, inspectors will:

- evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour
- uphold and demonstrate Ofsted's values at all times
- evaluate provision in line with the framework, inspection handbooks, national standards or regulatory requirements
- base all evaluations on clear and strong evidence
- declare all actual and perceived conflicts of interest and have no real or perceived connection with the provider that could undermine the objectivity of the inspection
- report honestly and clearly, ensuring that judgements are fair and reliable
- carry out their work with integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy, respect and sensitivity
- take all reasonable steps to prevent undue anxiety and to minimise stress
- act in the best interests and well-being of learners, prioritising the safeguarding of learners at all times
- maintain purposeful and productive communication with those being inspected and inform them of judgements sensitively, but clearly and frankly
- agree safety protocols that inspectors will follow to ensure that the inspection is completed in a COVID-secure way
- respect the confidentiality of information as far as possible, particularly when the information is about individuals and their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests
- take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues
- use their title of Her Majesty's Inspector, Early Years Regulatory Inspector or Ofsted Inspector only in relation to their work for Ofsted

Expectations of providers

In order to establish and maintain a positive working relationship, we expect providers to:

- be courteous and professional, treating inspectors with respect and sensitivity
- enable inspectors to carry out their visit in an open and honest way
- enable inspectors to evaluate the provision objectively against the framework, handbooks and national standards or regulatory requirements
- provide evidence – or access to evidence – that will enable the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision. This includes the opportunity for inspectors to meet with learners
- work with inspectors to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
- ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on their premises
- maintain purposeful and productive communication with the inspector or the inspection team
- bring any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors promptly and in a suitable manner
- recognise that sometimes inspectors will need to observe practice and talk to staff and users without the presence of a manager or registered person

Provision inspected under the education inspection framework

The framework applies to inspections of:

- maintained schools and academies under section 5 (which includes all sponsor-led academies, academy converter schools, academy special schools, free schools, special free schools, maintained nursery schools and alternative provision academies; university technical colleges and studio schools, 16 to 19 academies and 16 to 19 studio schools are also inspected under this framework)
- non-maintained special schools (as approved by the Secretary of State under section 342 of the Education Act 1996)
- pupil referral units
- non-association independent schools, as defined in the Education Act 1996 (this definition brings into the scope of inspection a number of very small independent schools, many of which have dual registration as an independent children's home and provide exclusively for vulnerable looked after young people who may also be disabled or have a special educational need)
- further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and independent specialist colleges independent learning providers
- community learning and skills providers
- employers funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to train their own employees
- higher education institutions providing further education
- providers of learning in the judicial services
- National Careers Service – careers advice and guidance
- registered early years settings

The grading scale used for inspection judgements

We will use a 4-point grading scale in all inspections to make the principal judgements:

- grade 1 – outstanding
- grade 2 – good
- grade 3 – requires improvement
- grade 4 – inadequate

Judgements made by inspectors

The framework ensures that inspectors make a coherent set of judgements across the different education, skills and early years settings. The remit handbooks set out the methods inspectors use to gather evidence and the main criteria they use to make judgements. In most instances, these methods and criteria are common across the different remits, but there will inevitably be some variation.

Overall effectiveness

Inspectors will use all the available evidence to evaluate what it is like to be a learner in the provision. In making the judgements about a provider's overall effectiveness, inspectors will consider whether the standard of education, training or care is good or outstanding. If it is not at least good, inspectors will consider whether it requires improvement or is inadequate.

Key judgements

Inspectors will also make graded judgements on the following areas using the 4-point scale:

- quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- personal development
- leadership and management

What inspectors will consider when making judgements

Inspectors will use the following criteria to make each of the graded judgements. These criteria are common for all the types of provision covered by the framework. Inspection remit handbooks explain how these criteria are applied in each context. We have updated the handbooks to reflect the COVID-19 context that education providers are operating in and the disruption the pandemic has caused to them. We will keep our handbook and methodology under review as circumstances change and we continue to emerge from the pandemic.

Note that we use the term 'teachers' throughout for brevity; this should be read as including early years practitioners, lecturers, trainers and assessors.

Quality of education

Inspectors will make a judgement on the quality of education by evaluating the extent to which:

Intent

- leaders take on or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or high needs, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life
- the provider's curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment
- the provider has the same academic, technical or vocational ambitions for almost all learners. Where this is not practical – for example, for some learners with high levels of SEND – its curriculum is designed to be ambitious and to meet their needs
- learners study the full curriculum. Providers ensure this by teaching a full range of subjects for as long as possible, 'specialising' only when necessary

Implementation

- teachers have good knowledge of the subject(s) and courses they teach. Leaders provide effective support for those teaching outside their main areas of expertise
- teachers present subject matter clearly, promoting appropriate discussion about the subject matter they are teaching. They check learners' understanding systematically, identify misconceptions accurately and provide clear, direct feedback. In doing so, they respond and adapt their teaching as necessary, without unnecessarily elaborate or differentiated approaches
- over the course of study, teaching is designed to help learners to remember in the long term the content they have been taught and to integrate new knowledge into larger concepts
- teachers and leaders use assessment well, for example to help learners embed and use knowledge fluently or to check understanding and inform teaching. Leaders understand the limitations of assessment and do not use it in a way that creates unnecessary burdens for staff or learners
- teachers create an environment that allows the learner to focus on learning. The resources and materials that teachers select – in a way that does not create unnecessary workload for staff – reflect the provider's ambitious intentions for the course of study and clearly support the intent of a coherently planned curriculum, sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment
- a rigorous approach to the teaching of reading develops learners' confidence and enjoyment in reading. At the early stages of learning to read, reading materials are closely matched to learners' phonics knowledge

Impact

- learners develop detailed knowledge and skills across the curriculum and, as a result, achieve well. Where relevant, this is reflected in results from national tests and examinations that meet government expectations, or in the qualifications obtained
- learners are ready for the next stage of education, employment or training. Where relevant, they gain qualifications that allow them to go on to destinations that meet their interests, aspirations and the intention of their course of study. They read widely and often, with fluency and comprehension.

Behaviour and attitudes

Inspectors will make a judgement on behaviour and attitudes by evaluating the extent to which:

- the provider has high expectations for learners' behaviour and conduct and applies these expectations consistently and fairly. This is reflected in learners' behaviour and conduct

- learners' attitudes to their education or training are positive. They are committed to their learning, know how to study effectively and do so, are resilient to setbacks and take pride in their achievements
- learners have high attendance and are punctual
- relationships among learners and staff reflect a positive and respectful culture.
- leaders, teachers and learners create an environment where bullying, peer-on-peer abuse or discrimination are not tolerated. If they do occur, staff deal with issues quickly and effectively, and do not allow them to spread

Personal development

Inspectors will make a judgement on the personal development of learners by evaluating the extent to which:

- the curriculum extends beyond the academic, technical or vocational. It provides for learners' broader development, enabling them to develop and discover their interests and talents
- the curriculum and the provider's wider work support learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy
- at each stage of education, the provider prepares learners for future success in their next steps
- the provider prepares learners for life in modern Britain by: equipping them to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society; developing their understanding of fundamental British values; developing their understanding and appreciation of diversity; celebrating what we have in common and promoting respect for the different protected characteristics as defined in law

Leadership and management

Inspectors will make a judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management by evaluating the extent to which:

- leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality, inclusive education and training to all. This is realised through strong, shared values, policies and practice
- leaders focus on improving staff's subject, pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge to enhance the teaching of the curriculum and the appropriate use of assessment. The practice and subject knowledge of staff are built up and improve over time
- leaders aim to ensure that all learners complete their programmes of study. They provide the support for staff to make this possible and do not allow gaming or off-rolling (there is no legal definition of 'off-rolling'; however, we define 'off-rolling' as the practice of removing a learner from the provider's roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the provider rather than in the best interests of the learner – off-rolling in these circumstances is a form of 'gaming')
- leaders engage effectively with learners and others in their community, including – where relevant – parents, carers, employers and local services
- leaders engage with their staff and are aware and take account of the main pressures on them. They are realistic and constructive in the way that they manage staff, including their workload
- leaders protect their staff from bullying and harassment
- those responsible for governance understand their role and carry this out effectively. They ensure that the provider has a clear vision and strategy and that resources are managed well. They hold leaders to account for the quality of education or training
- those with responsibility for governance ensure that the provider fulfils its statutory duties, for example under the Equality Act 2010, and other duties, for example in relation to the 'Prevent' strategy and safeguarding, and promoting the welfare of learners
- the provider has a culture of safeguarding that supports effective arrangements to: identify learners who may need early help or who are at risk of neglect, abuse, grooming or exploitation; help learners reduce their risk of harm by securing the support they need, or referring in a timely way to those who have the expertise to help; manage safe recruitment and allegations about adults who may be a risk to learners and vulnerable adults

Inspectors will always report on whether arrangements for safeguarding learners are effective.

Arrangements for different types of provision

In addition to the judgements set out in the framework, inspectors will need to make a variety of other judgements and carry out regulatory activity in different types of provision. This section sets out those additional judgements and activities.

Early years

The framework sets out how we will inspect providers on the Early Years Register. In addition to inspection, we are also responsible for the registration and regulation of these providers. You can read more about the registration and regulation of settings on the Early Years Register.

Non-association independent schools

Non-association independent schools are subject to the Independent School Standards. Inspectors will check that schools meet these standards during inspection.

We give maintained schools, academies and non-association independent schools that have early years foundation stage provision a separate grade for that provision as part of school inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) or section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. We inspect provision for 2- and 3-year-olds in schools as part of a school inspection. This contributes to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school.

Schools with sixth forms

We give maintained schools, academies and non-association independent schools a separate grade for sixth-form provision as part of school inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) or section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. This contributes to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school.

Settings with residential and boarding provision

The inspection of boarding and residential provision will be carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, regarding the national minimum standards for boarding or residential provision, as appropriate.

Further details of how these boarding or residential inspections will be carried out can be found in the sections of our social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) for: boarding schools and residential special schools and residential provision of further education colleges.

Further education and skills provision

Further education and skills providers will also have the following types of provision graded where appropriate: education programmes for young people; adult learning programmes; apprenticeships; and provision for learners with high needs. These contribute to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

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