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Official Statistics

Methodology and quality report: non-association independent schools inspections and outcomes in England

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Introduction

This paper contains methodology and quality information regarding Ofsted's [release of official statistics relevant to non-association independent schools](#), including information on inspection volumes and outcomes. We publish these statistics once a year.

This release informs on the outcomes of all inspections of non-association independent schools carried out between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021. Additionally, we have provided details of all [non-association schools](#) in England that are open and eligible for inspection, including information on their most recent Ofsted inspection outcomes at the end of the above specified period.

This methodology and quality report will make most sense if read alongside and as a supplement to the notes already contained within the statistical release.

Methodology

This section details the reporting methodology used to aggregate and analyse statistics on non-association independent schools and inspections.

The data in this official statistics series is from inspections carried out under sections 99, 109(1) and 109(2) of the [Education and Skills Act 2008](#). The regulations set out the standards that inspectors report on. This includes the extent to which the school meets the requirements of the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) (referred to as the independent school standards).

For official statistics, there is a time delay of 1 calendar month between the end of the reporting period (31 August 2021) and the publication cut-off date (30 September 2021). This helps to ensure that the majority of inspections carried out within the reporting period have reports 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. Any inspection reports published after the cut-off date will be included in our next release. If an inspection report was not published by the cut-off date, then the previous inspection will be reported as the school's most recent inspection, where applicable.

We will present and analyse the data in 2 ways:

- standard and additional inspections that have occurred within the academic year and have been published by the cut-off date
- the most recent standard 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

In exceptional circumstances, we may withhold or withdraw publication of an inspection report. Outcomes of withheld or withdrawn inspection reports are not included in any of the datasets and aggregate tables.

Most recent inspection outcomes data provides a state of the nation look at all schools open on the final day of the reporting period (31 August). If a school closed on 31 August but we inspected them within the reporting period, we would also include this school in the dataset.

This release only includes inspection outcomes of Ofsted-inspected non-association independent schools. We include inspection outcomes for state-funded schools, further education and skills providers and early years providers in [separate releases](#).

Data View

Data in this release is also used to update [Data View](#), an interactive Ofsted web tool.

Types of education

The official statistics of non-association independent schools includes 2 types of education:

- other independent schools
- other independent special schools

All state-funded and independent schools must register with the Department for Education (DfE). When a school provides early years provision for children aged 2 or over, we will inspect it as part of the section 109 school inspection and include the outcomes in this release. Early years provision that cares for children under 2 requires a separate registration on the Early Years Register (EYR). Early years providers included in the EYR will be subject to an Ofsted early years inspection. We report on these outcomes in the [official statistics for early years and childcare](#).

For boarding and residential schools that have gone through a section 109 school inspection, this will have included an inspection of the schools' welfare provision, where possible. These are referred to as [integrated inspections](#).

For schools that are also registered as children's homes, inspections may happen as either a full inspection of the children's home or as standalone inspections of the education provision. We attempt to avoid standalone inspections when possible. This is so inspectors can work together and share evidence in a full inspection of the children's home. Separate reports are always produced for full, or 'aligned', inspections: one provided to the DfE that covers the education provision and one for Ofsted that reports on the welfare inspection. The independent schools official statistics do not report on grades from the welfare inspection.

For more information on how we inspect non-association independent schools, see the [latest documentation for these inspections](#).

Applying the code of practice for statistics

[The UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics](#) provides producers of statistics with a framework based on 3 pillars:

- trustworthiness

- quality
- value

This section will discuss the 3 pillars and will provide additional information on meeting user needs.

Trustworthiness

Timeliness and punctuality

We currently publish data once a year. We include details of inspections that have taken place and have been published within the most recent complete academic year.

We publish data at 9.30am on the date pre-announced in the [statistical release calendar](#). Information on any delay in publication can also be found on the statistical release calendar.

We allow 1 calendar month after the end of the reporting period (31 August 2021) as the cut-off date for the inclusion of published inspection reports. This allows for the majority of inspections that have occurred within the reporting period to be published in the statistics.

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

We give pre-release access in accordance with the [Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order \(2008\)](#). You can find the list of postholders granted pre-release access on a separate document accompanying each release. We also announce publications on our social media channels.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

We may 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](#).

Quality

Accuracy and reliability

We extract the official statistics data from our administrative systems. While we aim to produce the highest quality data, errors in recording inspection outcomes may affect the quality of source data. We perform a number of rigorous quality

assurance checks to minimise the risk of reporting error.

The lead inspector is responsible for entering inspection outcomes data onto our systems. We perform a quality assurance process at this stage to minimise the risk of errors. In addition, we perform an additional quality assurance check on a sample of entries to make sure the original inspection report matches the data on the administrative system. We focus our attention on checking entries where the risk of error is likely to be greatest, for example if the inspection outcome awarded changes during the quality assurance process. In the unlikely event that a data error is still identified on our systems and this affects the quality of the data, we will provide a note in the release.

We moderate all inspection reports for schools with an overall judgement of inadequate. This may delay the publication of those reports until after the publication cut-off date. Therefore, these provisional statistics may contain a bias in under-representing the number of inadequate schools. Furthermore, [if we require further evidence to secure the inspection evidence base](#), we will delay publication of the inspection report.

The aim is to provide high-quality data subject to rigorous integrity checks. However, occasionally, revisions to the data may be necessary to correct errors, or if subsequent information or data is received. We publish revisions to official statistics in line with our [revisions policy](#).

A cut-off date for the publication of the reports included is given in the publication. We exclude schools that have yet to receive an inspection from charts and tables but they remain in the underlying datasets. Occasionally, an inspection report will be withheld following publication, usually to complete minor amendments with the agreement of the school, and we will not include this in inspection outcomes. Charts and tables will include footnotes to advise in these cases. We will also exclude inspection judgements if we publish the inspection report after the cut-off date. These will appear in later releases as revisions, after the inspection reports have been published.

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.

More information on the issues relating to the use of administrative data, as well as other considerations on the quality of data, is available in the various [standards for official statistics documents](#).

Data obtained from other sources

[Get Information About Schools \(GIAS\)](#) provides data on a school's type and phase of education. The quality of data in GIAS is considered to be good.

The DfE must verify any change to the type of education. Independent schools have some remit to change their age range through a local process. However, changes to key stages usually require agreement from the DfE and a material change inspection from Ofsted. The DfE's validation processes do pick up any errors but this may be after the event. The DfE requires schools to update their records every 90 days.

Coherence and comparability

Some of the tables and charts within the release compare yearly inspection outcomes across time (including the current year). There have been a number of framework changes since the first statistical release and we have reflected these in the publications. We have mapped changes to the way we grade overall effectiveness, and other judgements when possible, across frameworks. We explain this in more detail in the [framework section](#).

We will communicate inspection framework changes in the summary section of the main findings document. When changes to inspection frameworks or methodological changes have been implemented to improve the output, we have added guidance footnotes in the main findings document.

We may publish inspection reports after the final publication cut-off date for the release. In this case, the next official statistics release will include these outcomes in the revised data for the previous release.

Other sources of similar data

No other entity publishes comparable data for official or national statistics for non-association independent 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, the [Education and Training Inspectorate](#)

We are not responsible for and cannot comment on any third-party tools that display publicly available Ofsted inspection judgements.

We also produce management information 3 times a year on the outcomes of school inspections. At present, the methodology used to produce all releases is the same.

Changes that affect how comparable data is across time

Impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus)

Between 17 March 2020 and June 2021, standard inspections of schools were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We did, however, carry out additional inspections of schools as commissioned by the DfE.

Schools moving in and out of scope for inspection by Ofsted

We only inspect non-association independent schools, which are schools that are not members of an independent school association. The [Independent Schools Inspectorate](#) is responsible for independent schools that are part of an association. It is possible for schools to move between associations and therefore come under the remit of a different inspectorate. This will affect the appearance of the inspection history of the school in the release.

The release shows the most recent Ofsted inspection of a particular school but does not report on any inspections carried out by other inspectorates. This may result in the school appearing to have gone without an inspection for an extended period, when a different inspectorate has in fact inspected it in that time. Similarly, schools that have been previously inspected by us but now fall under a different inspectorate are not included in the release.

Integrated inspections

If a school offers residential boarding or is a residential special school, we aim to inspect both the education and boarding provision during the same inspection, known as an 'integrated inspection', to increase efficiency. Integrated inspections are shown in the event type of the underlying data.

Schools that are also registered as children's homes may have their education provision inspected alone or be aligned with the full inspection of the children's home. We will attempt to align both inspections so that inspectors may work together and share evidence. Aligned inspections still result in separate reports – one provided to the DfE covering the education provision and one for Ofsted covering the welfare inspection. Ofsted does not report welfare inspection grades as part of the independent schools official statistics. These events cannot be identified in the event detail of the inspection.

Frameworks

Changes to the inspection framework can affect the consistency of our reporting. For example, a change in judgements between frameworks may result in breaks or changes in the way those judgements are reported.

Ofsted introduced the [education inspection framework \(EIF\)](#) in September 2019. The framework is accompanied by [guidance and an inspection handbook](#) for each of the 4 remits. This replaced the [common inspection framework \(CIF\)](#), which was in place from 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2019.

Introduction of the EIF has had the following impacts on current reporting:

- overall effectiveness: this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date
- quality of education: this judgement was introduced with the EIF and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. Analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally and across time
- behaviour and attitudes: this judgement was introduced with the EIF and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. Analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally and across time
- personal development: this judgement was introduced with the EIF and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. Analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally and across time
- leadership and management: this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date
- early years provision (if applicable): this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date. However, due to legislation changes, this judgement was not reported on for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years. Nursery schools have not received a separate early years judgement since September 2015
- sixth-form provision (if applicable): this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date. However, due to legislation changes, this judgement was not reported on for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years

Some sub-judgements reported under the CIF have been superseded and are no longer reported in this release. These are: 'quality of teaching, learning and assessment', 'personal development, behaviour and welfare' and 'outcomes for pupils'. Users wishing to obtain these outcomes may consult individual inspection reports.

Policy implications

We must inspect all schools to which sections 109(1) and 109(2) of the [Education and Skills Act 2008](#) apply within prescribed intervals. These schools will typically receive a standard inspection within 3 years of the previous. However, we do not inspect all schools with equal regularity. We take a proportionate approach to inspection, as our inspection frameworks indicate.

The result of this is that the schools inspected in a particular academic year are only a subset of all schools. They are unlikely to represent schools as a whole. You should apply diligence when comparing school inspection outcomes across years. The reasons for this are discussed in the following sections.

Frequency of inspections

All schools received a standard inspection within 3 years from September 2015.

A new 3-year cycle of standard inspections began in September 2018. Our routine inspection of independent schools was paused during the COVID-19 pandemic. The inspection cycle has therefore been extended by 4 terms, and all independent schools will receive their inspection before the end of the cycle in December 2022.

Schools that are judged as requires improvement or inadequate normally have a standard inspection within 2 years of the previous standard inspection.

Since January 2015, schools that are judged to be inadequate normally receive a progress monitoring inspection before their next standard inspection. Schools that are judged as requires improvement following a standard inspection may also receive a progress monitoring inspection before their next standard inspection. These allow inspectors to assess the progress of the school in addressing any independent school standards that were not met and any other issues identified at the previous standard inspection.

Guidance on progress monitoring inspections is available in the [handbook for additional inspections of independent schools](#).

Carrying out additional inspections as part of a standard inspection

The DfE may commission Ofsted to carry out a standalone additional inspection or an inspection as part of a standard inspection. The DfE may also commission Ofsted to specifically inspect a school:

- for a school's application to make a material change to its registration
- to evaluate the school's implementation of its action plan
- to check that the school is meeting independent school standards that were previously not met
- through an emergency inspection due to concerns arising from a complaint or other information received about a school

Each of these has its own classification of inspection.

In order to increase efficiency, we will recommend to the DfE that we combine commissioned additional inspections with any standard inspection when they are already scheduled to take place in the same or following term. This will result in a single inspection event and a single published report.

New schools

Before opening a new school, the proprietors must first apply to the DfE for registration. The DfE asks proprietors to supply the information set out in section 98 of the [Education and Skills Act 2008](#) and [The Independent Educational Provision in England \(Provision of Information\) and Non-Maintained Special Schools \(England\) and Independent School Standards \(Amendment\) Regulations 2018](#).

Before the prospective school can open, the DfE requires Ofsted to perform a

pre-registration inspection as per the Education and Skills Act 2008. During the pre-registration inspection, the inspector will assess the extent to which the school is likely to meet the independent school standards at the time of the school's opening and indicate this to the DfE. The DfE will decide whether to register the school. From the summer term 2018, we have published these reports on our website and made them available to the school.

Once registered, a new school will receive its first standard inspection in its first year of operation. We publish these reports as normal on our website.

Boarding or residential provision

If a school provides residential boarding and the provision has been judged good or outstanding, we will inspect it within 3 years. If this provision has been judged as less than good, it will receive a subsequent standard inspection within 2 years. We inspect the provision annually in residential special schools.

In order to increase efficiency, we will [integrate](#) the inspection of boarding or residential provision in a boarding or residential special school with the school inspection when inspection cycles coincide. If inspection cycles do not coincide, only an inspection of the boarding or residential provision will be carried out.

Revised independent school standards

[Revised independent school standards](#) came into force from 5 January 2015. These apply to independent schools and, in part, to academies and free schools.

Value

Relevance

Through the inspection and regulation of schools and other settings, we aim to raise standards and improve lives: in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. These official statistics provide valuable evidence on the quality of schools in England and can inform the general public, government and policy to improve standards across the school sector.

We inspect non-association independent schools in accordance with sections 109(1) and 109(2) of the [Education and Skills Act 2008](#). We introduced the EIF in September 2019, under which schools are judged as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate.

During a standard inspection of a non-association independent school, we also assess whether the school meets the requirements of the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

Potential uses of the information provided by the official statistics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- media outlets using the main findings to inform the public about school quality across the country and particularly in local areas
- allowing users to monitor movement in the education sector across time, considering quality of provision geographically as well as among provider types
- making education policy decisions based on the accurate and current information in these statistics
- identifying areas of weak performance both for individual schools and nationally across the independent school sector. In turn, the DfE can respond appropriately to any issues identified and develop its policy strategies to mitigate them
- the Ofsted [Annual Report](#) is directly reliant on the main messages contained within the official statistics. Furthermore, we can use the data to continually evolve our inspection framework and inform policies to improve standards

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

Accessibility and clarity

We publish our releases in an accessible format on GOV.UK. The spreadsheets have been formatted to meet the web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. They are based on the recommendations listed in the [Government Statistical Service guidance on releasing statistics in spreadsheets](#).

The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data.

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 respondent burden in relation to this statistics release as the data is a by-product of our inspection process. The only cost involved is the internal resource involved in collating and producing the release.

Meeting user needs

Users of these statistics include the DfE, local authorities and schools.

The official statistics can help inform policy decisions and contribute towards the findings in Ofsted's Annual Report to Parliament.

In 2017, we ran a consultation to seek views on how Ofsted could make this release of statistics more timely and user friendly. In response to the consultation,

we changed the frequency of the publication from twice to once a year and introduced a [management information publication](#) 3 times a year.

Glossary

Definitions of terms are in our [glossary](#).

Further information

Contact us

We welcome feedback on our statistical releases. Please direct any comments, questions or suggestions about the data, its presentation or interpretation to the Early Years and Independent Schools Analysis team at childcaredataqueries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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