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> [Inspection of maintained schools and academies](#)

Guidance

Inspecting schools: guide for maintained and academy schools

This guide gives a summary of what schools should expect and what they need to do as part of an Ofsted inspection.

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Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Conduct during Ofsted inspections](#)
- [Timings of inspections](#)
- [Who inspects schools?](#)
- [Notice of an inspection](#)
- [Before the inspection begins](#)
- [During the inspection](#)
- [After the inspection visit](#)
- [Graded and ungraded inspections](#)
- [Information to share with inspectors](#)


Related content

- [Ofsted inspections of maintained schools and academies](#)
- [Independent schools inspection handbook](#)
- [Ofsted Parent View: toolkit for schools](#)
- [School inspection handbook](#)
- [IDSR: news and updates](#)

Collection

- [Education inspection framework](#)
- [Ofsted inspections of maintained schools and academies](#)

- [Seeking the views of parents, staff and pupils](#)
- [More information about school inspections](#)
- [Your views on the inspection](#)
- [Further guidance](#)
- [Gathering personal information on inspection](#)
- [Contact us](#)

 [Print this page](#)

Introduction

Schools can use this guide to help them understand the inspection process, including timings, notice that we give, judgements that we make and what happens after the visit.

Conduct during Ofsted inspections

Ofsted's [code of conduct](#) sets out the expectations for both inspectors and schools. At the start of the inspection (usually during the preparatory conversations), the lead inspector will explain these expectations and will ask schools to read the code.

Timings of inspections

Inspections can take place at any point from 5 school days after the first day pupils attend in the autumn term. For example, if pupils return to school on a Wednesday, an inspection can take place as early as the following Wednesday.

A school can request to [defer or cancel an inspection](#), but only in exceptional circumstances. If pupils are receiving education in the school, an inspection will usually go ahead.

How often we inspect a school depends on the findings of its previous inspection, as outlined below. Schools that were last inspected before the start of the pandemic may receive their first routine inspection up to 6 terms later than they would have previously. This is due to the suspension of routine inspection activity as a result of COVID-19.

We inspect schools under [section 5](#) or [section 8](#) of the Education Act 2005 (as amended).

New schools

We usually inspect all new schools, including academies, in the first 3 years after they open. This normally happens in the school's third year. New schools that opened before September 2020 and that have not had their first inspection can expect to be inspected in their fourth or fifth year of operation. This is due to the suspension of routine inspection activity as a result of COVID-19.

Read [guidance on how we select new schools for inspection](#).

Schools judged 'good' or 'outstanding'

A school judged good or outstanding at its most recent inspection will

normally receive an inspection approximately every 4 years, to confirm that the school remains good or outstanding. We call this an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a school would now be better than it was, or that standards may be declining, we will carry out a full inspection with graded judgements. We call this a graded inspection, and it is carried out under section 5 of the Education Act. Usually this is within 1 to 2 years of the date of the ungraded inspection, but if we have serious concerns about a school, for example in relation to safeguarding, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

However, some good schools will automatically receive a graded inspection. We use a risk assessment process to ensure that our approach to inspection is proportionate, in order to focus our efforts on where we can have the greatest impact.

Outstanding schools that were formerly exempt from routine inspections

Between 15 May 2012 and 13 November 2020, maintained primary and secondary schools and academies judged to be outstanding in their overall effectiveness at their most recent graded inspection were exempt from routine inspections. These schools are now once again subject to routine inspections. This also applies to academy converter schools that were formerly exempt because the overall effectiveness of the predecessor school was outstanding at its most recent graded inspection. (Academy converter schools are schools that have been approved by the Secretary of State to convert to become an academy.)

All formerly exempt schools will receive an initial graded or ungraded inspection before 1 August 2025. Those schools that received their last graded inspection before September 2015 will receive an initial graded inspection. Those that received their last graded inspection after this date will receive an initial ungraded inspection. If that ungraded inspection indicates that outstanding performance may not have been maintained, we will normally carry out a graded inspection within the next 12 months or as soon as possible thereafter and, in any event, before 1 August 2026. Beyond these initial inspections, future inspections for these schools will take place as set out in the section above.

Schools judged 'requires improvement'

A school judged as requires improvement at its last inspection is a school that is not yet good but overall provides an acceptable standard of education. The school will receive a graded inspection again within a period of 30 months.

If a school has been judged as requires improvement at 2 successive inspections, it will be subject to monitoring from inspectors to check its progress. We will carry out a graded inspection again within a period of 30 months of the publication of the previous graded inspection report.

Schools judged 'inadequate'

When we judge a school as inadequate, we place the school in a category of concern. This means that we judge the school either to have serious weaknesses or to require special measures.

The Secretary of State for Education will issue an academy order to a

maintained school judged inadequate and placed in a category of concern. The school will then become a sponsored academy. We will not usually monitor the school unless there are safeguarding concerns or there is a delay in the school becoming a sponsored academy.

If an academy is judged inadequate and placed in a category of concern, we will monitor the school. If an academy is judged inadequate and is rebrokered to a new multi-academy trust to become a new sponsored academy, we will not usually carry out any monitoring inspections.

If an academy is judged as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures, and if it is not rebrokered to a new multi-academy trust, we will monitor the school to check its progress. We will then carry out a graded inspection within 30 months of the publication of the academy's previous graded inspection report.

If a maintained nursery school or a non-maintained special school is judged inadequate on a graded inspection, we will monitor it in the same way as an academy judged as inadequate that is not re-brokered to a new sponsor trust.

Who inspects schools?

School inspectors are:

- His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) employed directly by Ofsted
- contracted Ofsted Inspectors

Notice of an inspection

We will normally notify the school of its inspection between 10.30am and 2pm on the school day before the start of the inspection.

We can inspect any school without notice, if judged appropriate. In these cases, the lead inspector will normally telephone the school about 15 minutes before arriving.

Before the inspection begins

We provide schools with a letter to tell all parents of pupils at the school about the inspection and options for providing their views. We also ask schools to notify other relevant bodies, including those providing alternative provision for pupils, of the inspection.

Leaflet for schools

Please read and act on the guidance in our [Leaflet for schools](#) (PDF, 194 KB, 6 pages).

This leaflet lists the information and documents that inspectors will need to see before and during the inspection.

You will need to submit some of this information through the [provider portal](#).

We will send you your username and password for the portal separately.

Inspectors will look at [Ofsted Parent View](#) to see the views of parents.

Inspectors will also take into account the results of any past parent surveys, or other surveys, carried out by the school. Parents can tell Ofsted about their child's school at any time using Ofsted Parent View.

During the inspection

The inspection will normally last 2 full days. Inspections of good primary schools and good or outstanding maintained nursery schools with less than 150 pupils will normally last for 1 day. The number of inspectors on the inspection team will vary according to the size and nature of the school.

Inspectors will spend most of their time observing lessons and gathering evidence to inform their judgements.

Inspectors will talk to a range of pupils and staff about important aspects of the school's work. Inspectors will also take account of external views of the school's performance. This may include any evaluation of the school's performance by the local authority.

Inspectors will make their final judgements when they have collected and considered all the evidence.

The lead inspector will meet the headteacher regularly throughout the inspection and will ensure that the headteacher and senior staff:

- are kept up to date about the inspection
- understand how the inspection team reaches its judgements
- have opportunities to clarify how evidence is used to reach judgements
- have the opportunity to present evidence

Inspectors will invite the school's headteacher, curriculum leaders and other leaders to take part in joint visits to lessons, as agreed with the lead inspector.

Inspectors will also invite the headteacher to attend the final team meeting at the end of the inspection.

Inspectors will give oral feedback to teachers and other staff about the work that they see.

Inspection and the COVID-19 pandemic

Our approach to inspection will take into account the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption it has caused to schools. Inspectors will discuss the impact of the pandemic with the school, including how the school leadership responded to the situation, and will take that into account in their assessment of the school.

Feedback

At the final feedback meeting, the lead inspector must make clear:

- the grades awarded for each judgement
- that these grades are provisional and may be subject to change following quality assurance procedures and should remain confidential
- that the written report will mention the main points in the feedback

- how the report will be published
- the complaints procedure
- if relevant, the implications of the school being judged as requires improvement
- if relevant, the implications of the school being placed in special measures or deemed to have serious weaknesses

The inspection team will explain its judgements to the senior leadership team and those responsible for the governance of the school. The school should invite all those responsible for the governance of the school to hear the feedback.

After the inspection visit

The lead inspector will write a report setting out the inspection findings.

We send the draft report to the school, usually within 18 working days of the end of the inspection. The school has 5 working days to comment on the draft report, inspection process and findings.

Typically, we will send the school an electronic version of the final report within 30 working days of the end of the inspection. In most circumstances, we will publish the final report on the [Ofsted reports website](#) within 38 working days of the end of the inspection.

We send a copy of the report to:

- the school's headteacher
- the local authority
- the appropriate authority or proprietor (for example, the governing body or the academy trust where the local authority is not the appropriate authority)
- the person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has them (including diocesan or other appropriate authorities in the case of schools with a religious character)
- other prescribed persons such as the Department for Education or the Education and Skills Funding Agency

The school must also supply a copy of the report to all parents of registered pupils at the school.

Graded and ungraded inspections

Ofsted's [education inspection framework](#) came into effect in September 2019.

Under the framework, for graded inspections, inspectors will make the following judgements about schools:

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

If the school offers early years provision and sixth-form provision, inspectors will also make judgements on these areas.

When we have judged a school to be good or outstanding, we will then normally go into the school once every 4 years to confirm that the school remains good or outstanding and that safeguarding is effective. We call this an ungraded inspection of a good or outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection.

Information to share with inspectors

Schools are not expected to prepare anything extra for inspectors, but the lead inspector will be in touch to ask for some information as early as possible to help them plan the inspection.

This will include:

- a list of staff (indicating early career teachers, mentors and induction tutors) and whether any relevant staff are absent
- whether any teachers cannot be observed for any reason (for example, if they are subject to capability procedures)
- whether there is anyone working on site who is normally employed elsewhere in the multi-academy trust (if relevant)
- maps and other practical information, such as on whether the school uses interpreters or other specialist support
- access to the school's Wi-Fi, so that inspectors can connect to the internet
- the school timetable, and times for the school day, including any planned interruptions to normal school routines during the inspection.

The lead inspector will request that the following information is available at the start of the inspection:

- strategic documents about the school, including:
 - anything that sets out school improvement planning or the longer-term vision for the school, such as the school or the trust's strategy
 - for maintained schools, minutes of governors' meetings and other relevant strategic documentation about governance that the school may have
 - for academies, minutes of trust board meetings and other relevant strategic documentation about the trust that the school may have
 - a summary of any school self-evaluation and/or improvement plan or equivalent
 - any reports from any external evaluation of the school
- records and information about behaviour and attendance, including:
 - up-to-date attendance analysis for all groups of pupils
 - records and analysis of pupils taken off roll
 - records and analysis of exclusions and suspensions, incidents of poor behaviour and any use of internal isolation
 - records and analysis of bullying, discriminatory and prejudiced behaviour, either directly or indirectly, including racist, sexist, disability and homophobic/biphobic/transphobic bullying, use of derogatory language and racist incidents
 - records and analysis of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence
 - records and analysis of any restrictive physical intervention.

Safeguarding information On arrival at the school, inspectors must have secure access to safeguarding information, including:

- the single central record for the school

- a list of any referrals made to the designated person for safeguarding in the school and those that were subsequently referred to the local authority, along with brief details of the resolution
- a list of all pupils who have open cases with children's services or social care and all pupils who have a multi-agency plan Schools and inspectors must ensure that all actions are compliant with legal requirements on information-handling.

If any of this information is available before the inspection begins, you can upload it onto the inspection portal. We provide instructions for using the portal in the notification of inspection letter.

Inspectors will use a range of technology to gather evidence electronically, including mobile devices, tablets and laptops. They may also request to take photographic evidence, for example of pupils' work and displays. Inspectors will not take photographs of pupils.

Seeking the views of parents, staff and pupils

Parents will give their views about their child's school on [Ofsted Parent View](#), which they can access at any time. This includes at the point of inspection, when we will provide them with a link to the Ofsted Parent View website.

Staff and pupils will be encouraged to complete a voluntary online survey, available at the point of inspection.

More information about school inspections

The [school inspection handbook](#) explains how we carry out inspections and the judgements that inspectors make on graded inspections. It contains the grade descriptors that inspectors use when making their judgements. The handbook also explains how we carry out ungraded inspections and urgent inspections under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The [school monitoring handbook](#) explains how we carry out monitoring inspections of schools that were judged at their most recent graded inspection as requires improvement or as inadequate (having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures).

The [education inspection framework](#) sets out the statutory basis for schools inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended).

Your views on the inspection

Following your inspection, we will invite you to complete an online inspection survey. The online survey asks for your views on the inspection process, including the impact that the inspection is likely to have in bringing about improvement. We value all survey responses. We use the outcomes to help keep us informed about the quality and impact of inspections and to help guide us in reviewing and improving the inspection process.

Complaints about an inspection

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection should be raised immediately with the lead inspector during the inspection.

For issues that cannot be resolved during the inspection, [a formal](#)

[complaint can be lodged.](#)

Further guidance

You can [access our guidance for inspections of maintained schools and academies](#).

Gathering personal information on inspection

Inspectors will gather any personal information necessary to assist them in inspecting a school. [Our privacy policy](#) sets out what personal information we collect, what we do with it, how long we keep it and individuals' rights under data protection legislation.

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