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Official Statistics

Methodology: Non-association independent schools inspections and outcomes in England

Published 30 November 2022

Applies to England

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Introduction

This paper contains methodology and quality information about 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 includes the outcomes of all inspections of non-association independent schools carried out between 1 September 2021 and 31 August 2022. We have also 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 period specified above.

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

Changes since last release

There have been no changes to the methodology that we use to produce these statistics since our last release.

There have been the following policy changes since our last release that may affect comparability with previous years:

- The latest cycle of standard inspections began in September 2018; due to COVID-19, the cycle has been [extended to the end of December 2022](#)
- Since the summer term 2021, an independent school's next standard inspection may be [brought forward](#) following an additional inspection
- The introduction of [new standards](#) to inspection data

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 delay of 1 calendar month between the end of the reporting period (31 August 2022) and the publication cut-off date (30 September 2022). This helps to ensure that most inspections carried out within the reporting period have reports published, and are included in the official statistics. We do this to minimise bias. For instance, inspection reports of schools judged inadequate undergo additional moderation checks and may otherwise miss a shorter reporting period. If an inspection report is not published by the cut-off date, then the previous inspection is reported as the school's most recent inspection. Any inspection report published after the cut-off date will be included in the revision tables of our next release.

We present and analyse the data in 2 ways:

- standard and additional inspections carried out during the academic year, and with a report published by the cut-off date
- the most recent standard inspection outcome of all open schools at the end of the reporting period, including 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.

The most recent data on inspection outcomes 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 it within the reporting

period, we would include this school in the dataset.

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

Types of education

Non-association independent schools include 2 types of school:

- other independent schools
- other independent special schools

All state-funded and independent schools must register with the Department for Education (DfE). When a school offers 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 years old requires a separate registration on the Early Years Register (EYR), and will be subject to an Ofsted early years inspection. We report on these outcomes in the [official statistics for early years and childcare](#).

If a school offers boarding or is a residential special school, and the school's standard inspection is due in the same financial year as the full inspection of its boarding or residential provision, we will normally carry out an 'aligned' inspection. Aligned inspections are carried out by 2 separate inspection teams (education and social care). They result in 2 sets of graded judgements and 2 separate published reports. The independent schools official statistics only report on grades from the education part of the inspection. The 2021/22 inspections can be identified from the underlying data in the inspection-type grouping field. Inspections prior to September 2021 and additional inspections are known as integrated inspections, and can also be identified in the underlying data.

The inspections of schools that are also registered as children's homes may be standalone inspections of the education provision, or may be carried out

at the same time as the full inspection of the children's home. Again, where possible, we would attempt to carry out both inspections at the same time. Separate reports are always produced for full and aligned inspections: one provided for the DfE that covers the education provision; and one for Ofsted that reports on the welfare inspection. The independent schools official statistics only report on grades from the education element of the inspection. Inspections that were aligned with children's home inspections cannot be identified in the event detail in the underlying data.

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

This section is broken down by the 3 pillars of the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#):

- trustworthiness
- quality
- value

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](#).

The statistical release calendar will also include any information on delays to the publication.

The cut-off date for including published inspection reports is 1 calendar month after the end of the reporting period. 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 around 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 this release.

We also announce publication of the statistics on our social media channels.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

When we hold sensitive or personal data, our disclosure control processes ensure that it is not published. All data releases follow [our confidentiality and revisions policies](#).

Quality

Accuracy and reliability

We extract data on inspection outcomes 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 errors.

The lead inspector is responsible for entering inspection outcomes data on to our systems. 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 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 is changed 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 when a school is judged to be inadequate. This may delay the publication of those reports until after the publication cut-off date. Therefore, these provisional statistics may under-represent the number of inadequate schools. Furthermore, [if we require further evidence to secure the inspection evidence base](#), this will delay publication of the inspection report.

Occasionally, revisions to the data may be necessary to correct errors. We publish revisions to official statistics in line with our [revisions policy for official statistics](#).

We exclude schools that have yet to be inspected from charts and tables, but they remain in the underlying datasets. Occasionally, we will withhold an inspection report following publication, usually to complete minor amendments with the agreement of the school. We exclude the inspection outcomes of withheld inspection reports from our data. We also exclude inspection judgements if we publish the inspection report after the cut-off date.

Technical production

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

More information on the issues relating to the use of administrative data is available in the [Ofsted standards for official statistics](#).

Data obtained from other sources

We get data indicating whether schools are opened or closed, their type, religious character and religious ethos from the DfE's [Get Information about](#)

[Schools \(GIAS\)](#) database.

The DfE considers the quality of data in GIAS to be good. The DfE must verify any change to the type of education. Independent schools have some power to change their age range through a local process. However, changes to key stages usually require the DfE's agreement and a material change inspection from Ofsted. The DfE's validation processes do pick up 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 in the release compare yearly inspection outcomes across time (including the current year). The inspection framework has changed several times since the first statistical release, and we have reflected these changes in the publications. The overall effectiveness judgement has remained broadly comparable across the different frameworks since 2005. Other judgements are, where possible, mapped across frameworks when changes occur. We explain this in more detail in the [framework section](#).

We will communicate changes to the inspection framework 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.

If we publish inspection reports after the final publication cut-off date for the release, we include the inspection outcomes in the revised data tables of the next release.

Other sources of similar data

No other organisation publishes comparable official or national statistics for non-association independent school inspections in England.

For the devolved nations, inspections are carried out and reviews and reports 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 over 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 \(ISI\)](#) 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 school's inspection history 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 ISI. 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 are not included in the release when they have been inspected by us previously, but now fall under ISI.

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.

We 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.

The impact of the EIF on inspection judgements is as follows:

- 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 should 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 standard inspection. 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 be diligent when comparing school inspection outcomes across years. The reasons for this are discussed in the following section.

Frequency of standard inspections

The latest 3-year cycle of standard inspections began in September 2018. As our routine inspection of independent schools was temporarily paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, the inspection cycle has been extended by 4 terms to the end of December 2022.

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

Once registered, a new school will receive its first standard inspection in its first year of operation.

As of the summer term 2021, an independent school's next standard inspection may be brought forward following an additional inspection, in order to update the school's judgements. There are 2 scenarios when this may happen:

- a school that was judged requires improvement or inadequate has received a progress monitoring inspection, and now meets all of its previously failed independent school standards

- a good or outstanding school is judged to no longer meet the independent school standards at either: an emergency inspection; a material change inspection, where the school has already implemented the change before getting approval from the DfE

Revised independent school standards

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](#).

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

New standards for paragraph 2A were included in the independent school standards in 2020, and appear in the underlying data for inspections from December 2021 only.

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 so as to improve standards across the independent school sector.

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 policy strategies to mitigate them
- His Majesty's Chief Inspector's [Annual Report](#) relies directly on the main messages in the official statistics. Furthermore, we can use the data to evolve our inspection framework and inform policies so as 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 information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data.

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 comes from the internal resources involved in collating and producing the publication.

Meeting user needs

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

The official statistics can help inform policy decisions and contribute to 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 a year 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. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions about the data, its presentation or interpretation please contact the Early Years and Independent Schools Analysis team at childcaredataqueries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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