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Official Statistics

Methodology: state-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 December 2023

Published 14 March 2024

Applies to England

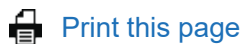
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Introduction

This document contains methodology and quality information relevant to [our official statistics release of state-funded school inspections and outcomes data](#), which we publish twice a year.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly on inspectioninsight@ofsted.gov.uk with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

This official statistics release reports on the outcomes of state-funded school inspections that we carried out within the most recent reporting period. It also includes the details of all open schools, with their most recent inspection outcomes, where available. If we have not yet inspected a school in its current form (such as a new academy), we will include the inspection outcome of its predecessor school to give a more comprehensive view of the sector. This release covers all state-funded schools in England.

Applying the code of practice

This section is broken down by the 3 pillars of the [code of practice for official statistics](#):

- trustworthiness
- quality
- value

Trustworthiness

Timeliness and punctuality

Data is currently published twice a year and includes details of inspections that have taken place and been published within the reporting period.

We publish data at 9.30am on the date pre-announced in the [publication schedule](#).

You can also find information on any delay in publication on the publication schedule.

The cut-off period for including published inspection reports in the statistics is usually 1 calendar month plus 1 week after the end of the reporting period. This is to allow time for the majority of the

relevant reports to have been published. We do not usually publish inspection reports during school holidays, so the timing of school holidays can affect the proportion of reports that are published by the cut-off date for the statistics.

The average production time for this official statistics release is approximately 6 weeks. This time includes obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs, securing internal sign-off and uploading the information to GOV.UK.

We announce publication of the statistics on our social media channels on the day of publication. We give pre-release access in accordance with the [Pre-release to Official Statistics Order \(2008\)](#).

You can find the list of postholders granted pre-release access as a separate document accompanying each release.

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

Information on inspection outcomes is extracted from our administrative systems. While we aim to produce the highest-quality statistics, there are occasional differences between the data on the administrative system and the final inspection report. Reasons for this include changes being made during the quality assurance process. We perform rigorous quality assurance checks, including checking a sample of entries to ensure that the inspection report matches the data on the administrative system. If the data recorded on the system affects reporting, we will provide a note in the release.

Since October 2018, the publication dates for inspection reports shown on our statistical publications have been 1 day earlier than those displayed on the Ofsted website.

We [moderate all inspection reports](#) when a school is judged to be inadequate. This may result in some inspection reports being published after the publication cut-off date required for inclusion in the provisional release. Therefore, provisional statistics are likely to slightly under-represent schools that have been placed in a category of concern. In addition, when there are concerns that further evidence may be required to secure the inspection evidence base, this will delay publication of an inspection report.

We publish revisions to the data (adding the outcomes of any inspection reports published after the original cut-off date) in line with our [revisions policy for official statistics](#).

Technical production

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

Read [more information on issues relating to the use of administrative data](#).

Data obtained from other sources

We get data indicating whether schools are open or have closed, their type, phase of education, religious character, religious ethos and any links to predecessor schools from the Department for Education (DfE)'s [Get Information about Schools](#) (GIAS) database.

Data is sourced from GIAS at the end of the reporting period. For inspections in the academic year, we provide information about the school on the day of inspection. For the most recent inspections, we provide information about the school as at the end of the reporting period.

The DfE considers the quality of data on school openings and closures to be good. Changes that occur because of schools converting to academy status, transferring between academy trusts or closing to become sponsor-led academies are managed centrally by the DfE, which carries out monthly reconciliation checks of these changes against its other data systems. While there can be slight delays in changes coming through to the systems, these are corrected in later releases. Local authorities and governing bodies of maintained schools can make changes of up to 2 years to the age range of schools, through a non-statutory process. Errors are picked up as part of the DfE's process for validating performance tables, but this may be after the event. The DfE requires schools to update their records every 90 days.

Coherence and comparability

The tables and charts in the release compare inspection outcomes over the past few years. We have updated all these tables and charts to reflect the [changes made](#), since June 2018, to the way we compile data on most recent inspection outcomes. Inspection outcomes of predecessor schools are included, where applicable, for each period.

There have also been a number of framework changes since the first release of statistics, and these have been reflected in the publications.

The overall effectiveness judgement has remained broadly comparable across the different frameworks since 2005. Other judgements are, when possible, mapped across frameworks when changes occur. We explain this in more detail in the ['Changes to inspection frameworks'](#) section.

When these changes have occurred, we have alerted users through updates in the official statistics introduction and methodology sections of the key findings document. When changes to inspection frameworks or methodological changes have been implemented to improve the output, we have added guidance footnotes and the key findings document for easy access.

Some of Ofsted's and the DfE's policies affect how easily different school types can be compared with each other, or with all schools as a whole. Comparisons between school types should be treated with caution.

Other sources of similar data

No comparable data is published by other organisations that produce official statistics or accredited official statistics for 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, [Education and Training Inspectorate](#)

We also produce monthly [management information](#) on the outcomes of school inspections.

Several third parties provide interactive tools that display publicly available Ofsted inspection judgements. Some of these may be collated using web scraping to extract inspection outcomes from published inspection reports. We cannot comment on the quality of these datasets.

Changes to inspection frameworks

We introduced the [education inspection framework \(EIF\)](#) in September 2019, following a consultation.

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
- effectiveness of leadership and management: this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date
- quality of education: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement is only possible for inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision in all schools nationally
- behaviour and attitudes: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement is only possible for inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision in all schools nationally
- personal development: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement is only possible for inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision in all schools nationally
- early years provision (if applicable): this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date, with the exception of the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years when, due to [legislation changes](#), the judgement was not made at inspections. Since September 2015, nursery schools have not received a separate early years judgement
- sixth-form provision (if applicable): this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2005 to date. However, this judgement was not reported in 2012/13 and 2013/14 due to changes in legislation. Between 2005 and 2012, the judgement was made under the 'overall effectiveness of the sixth form' judgement, which was replaced by the 16-to-19 study programme judgement in September 2005. This was replaced by sixth-form provision (if applicable) from September 2019

The selection process

Schools are not inspected with equal regularity. Ofsted must inspect all schools to which section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) applies, within prescribed intervals.

The result of this is that the schools inspected in a particular academic year are unlikely to be representative of schools as a whole. This may also affect the comparability of school inspection outcomes between years. This is as a result of the following selection rules.

Selection rules

Between 2012 and 2020, outstanding primary and secondary schools were exempt from routine inspection. As of November 2020, all formerly exempt schools must receive an initial graded or ungraded inspection before 1 August 2025. Schools that last had a graded inspection before September 2015 will usually receive a graded inspection. Those that last had a graded inspection after September 2015 will usually receive an ungraded inspection. If the ungraded inspection indicates that the school may not have maintained its outstanding performance, we will normally carry out a graded inspection within 12 months.

Some good and outstanding schools will receive a graded inspection instead of an ungraded inspection. This will happen, for example, if a school has undergone significant change, such as in its age range, or if there are indications that the quality of provision may have deteriorated significantly. We will select these schools through our risk assessment process (except for previously exempt schools, which will be selected according to the process set out in the previous paragraph).

Schools are usually inspected at prescribed intervals. However, we paused inspections in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has affected the length of time between inspections for many schools. Between May 2021 and August 2025, we are aiming to catch up on the inspections we missed and to inspect all schools by August 2025. For more details, see our recent [blog on school inspection timescales](#).

The comparability of data on the most recent inspection outcomes for all schools

The official statistics include analysis of the most recent inspection outcomes of all open schools (based on around 22,000 schools nationally). This analysis is often summarised as the percentage of schools judged good or outstanding at the end of each academic year. We, and others, use this statistic to try to measure the quality of the school sector over time.

A number of the factors discussed previously in this document affect the comparability of this statistic over time and should, therefore, be used with caution.

Comparability factors

A range of factors affect both how and when we inspect, and limit the comparability of inspection outcomes over time.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Between 17 March 2020 and 31 March 2021, section 5(1) of the Education Act 2005 was disapplied under the Coronavirus Act 2020. As a result, routine inspections of schools were

suspended and did not resume until the summer term of 2021. We did, however, carry out some non-routine inspections of schools under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. These included [additional monitoring visits, in the spring term of 2021, to schools judged less than good](#).

We are required to inspect, at prescribed intervals, all schools to which section 5 applies. The law usually requires the maximum interval for graded inspections to be within 5 school years of the end of the school year in which the last graded (or relevant ungraded) inspection took place. However, for the first routine inspection of schools after 4 May 2021, the maximum interval will be up to 7 years instead. [\[footnote 1\]](#)

Ofsted committed to inspecting all schools between May 2021 and July 2025. To meet this commitment, we have been gradually increasing the number of inspections we carry out each year. This will enable us to reduce the inspection interval for schools inspected most recently before the pandemic.

Outstanding schools that were formerly exempt from routine inspections

Between 15 May 2012 and 13 November 2020, primary and secondary schools judged to be outstanding in their overall effectiveness at their most recent graded inspection were exempt from routine inspections. These schools are once again receiving routine graded inspections.

The changes to ungraded inspections of all good schools and outstanding special schools, nursery schools and pupil referral units introduced in January 2018

These ungraded inspections now only convert to a graded inspection if there are concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education. If the inspector thinks that the school may be declining, but does not convert the ungraded inspection to a graded inspection, then the outcome of the inspection is that the next inspection will be a graded inspection. Far fewer ungraded inspections have converted to graded inspections since this change. This policy change means that some schools are still classed as good or outstanding in our data, whereas under the previous policy the inspections might have converted, and some of these schools might have then been judged to have a lower grade.

Introduction of ungraded inspections of all good and outstanding special schools, nursery schools and pupil referral units

In September 2015, we introduced ungraded inspections of all good schools and outstanding special schools, nursery schools and pupil referral units. When an ungraded inspection converts to a graded inspection, the outcome is reported in the outcomes for graded inspections. We have also added additional tables to the release to show the numbers of these schools, the proportion that converted to graded inspections and the resulting inspection outcomes. When a school remains the same grade, for transparency, we also include all ungraded inspections that did not convert, as they have confirmed the grade of the previous graded inspection.

Before September 2015, all good schools received a graded inspection no later than the fifth academic year after their last inspection, including in cases when they continued to provide the same standard of education.

Therefore, users should be particularly cautious if comparing outcomes from 2015/16, or later, with those of previous years.

Changes to inspection frameworks over time

The overall effectiveness judgement is intended to be broadly comparable across all frameworks from 2005, when graded inspections began. Over time, there may have been some fluctuations in where the bar is set between good and requires improvement/satisfactory. However, we do not believe that there has been, since 2010, a notable lowering of this bar that would entirely account for the substantial rise in the proportion of schools judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection.

The different lengths of time between inspections for schools of each grade

Schools that are less than good are usually inspected more frequently than other schools. The impact of this is seen most clearly when users of our data try to compare inspections that take place in individual academic years. The inspections carried out in any single year are not designed to be representative of all schools nationally, and the mix of grades is usually lower than that seen across all schools at their most recent inspection. Schools are risk assessed regularly, and we can bring inspections forward at any time if we have concerns about a school.

Value

Relevance

Information in this release has 5 distinct purposes:

- it allows media outlets to use our key findings to inform the public about the quality of schools across the country and in local areas
- it allows users to track movement in the education sector, and to monitor the quality of provision available at a national and local level and across provider types
- it gives an accurate picture of the quality of provision, which influences policy decisions about the location and quality of school provision
- it helps to identify areas of weak performance, which assists the DfE, local authorities and multi-academy trusts in developing policies and strategies to address performance-related issues
- in Ofsted, analysis of inspection outcomes informs the development of the inspection framework and underpins policies to improve standards; also, the key messages in the official statistics contribute towards the findings in HMCI's Annual Report to Parliament

The data included in the release is generated by our 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. Each release includes outcomes from completed inspections that have been published. The aim of the data is to keep users informed of the progress of the inspection framework and changes in the state-funded schools sector.

Each release includes underlying supporting data in an accessible format, to allow users to perform their own analysis. Users may use and reuse 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 burden on respondents in relation to this statistics release because data is a by-product of Ofsted's inspection process. The only cost is the internal resource involved in collating the release.

Assessment of users' needs and perceptions

We regularly review these official statistics to ensure that they meet users' needs. This has included running several public consultations in the last few years.

In November 2017, we consulted on proposals to change the way we compile data on schools' most recent inspections. Respondents supported these proposals. Based on these findings, [we made all of the changes proposed in the consultation](#). We applied these for the first time in the official statistics published in June 2018.

In November 2021, we began a review of our suite of statistical publications. We carried out a 10-week investigation to understand more about our production processes, and internal and external users' needs. This was so that we could make evidence-based decisions on how to improve our statistical publications and how to provide more value for the same amount of effort.

We have published the [report covering this review](#).

Based on the wide range of feedback from producers, internal and external users and other research findings, we have:

- reduced the number of state-funded schools official statistics releases to 2 per year, dropping the June release
- introduced written commentaries to accompany 3 management information releases per year
- decommissioned Data View, and replaced it with '[Five-Year Ofsted Inspection Data](#)'.

We welcome feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the schools data and analysis team on inspectioninsight@ofsted.gov.uk.

Methodology

Data in this official statistics series is from inspections carried out under [sections 5 and 8 of the Education Act 2005](#). You can find further detail on the dates of inspections in the release. If an inspection report is not published by the cut-off date given in the release, then the previous inspection will be reported as a school's most recent inspection, where applicable.

We will present and analyse:

- inspections that have occurred within the academic year being reported when published by the given date
- the most recent 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. When an open school has not yet been inspected, we will include the inspection outcome of its predecessor school to give a more comprehensive view of the sector

For official statistics, the cut-off period for including published inspection reports in the statistics is 1 calendar month plus 1 week after the end of the reporting period. This helps to ensure that the majority of inspections carried out within the reporting period have reports that are published and reflected in 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.

Under 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.

We include data in the school-level data for any maintained school receiving [a warning notice from a local authority](#). We have not included any warning notices given by local authorities that are currently under appeal or that have been withdrawn.

When statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have declined or improved, they refer to the most recent inspection outcome compared with the previous inspection outcome. When we have not inspected a school in its current form, the most recent inspection (and the previous inspection outcome) will relate to the predecessor school.

Ofsted reports on various phases of education, which include different types of establishment.

When early years provision is governed by the school or it provides care for children aged 2 or over, we inspect it as part of the graded inspection and include the outcomes in the school's statistical release. Early years provision that cares for children aged under 2 needs to be registered on the Early Years Register and will have an early years inspection. We report on these outcomes under our early years official statistics.

When a boarding or residential special school's graded or ungraded inspection is due in the same financial year as the graded 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. We will also publish a summary letter on our reports website, using extracts from both reports.

Glossary

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

1. Education (School Inspection) (England) Regulations 2005 as amended by Regulation 2(3) of the Education (School Inspection) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/170) [↩](#)

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