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Guidance

# School monitoring operating guide for inspectors: for use from November 2025

Updated 5 November 2025

**Applies to England**

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**For use on inspections from 10 November 2025.**

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## About this guide

This guide sets out how lead inspectors ('you') should carry out monitoring of state-funded schools, including how to conduct the introductory call (where relevant) to plan the school's monitoring programme.

This guide complements Ofsted's [operating guide for full inspections](#), as well as the [framework](#), our separate [inspection information for schools](#) and our [toolkit for schools](#).

## Conduct

You must act in line with our [code of conduct](#), and demonstrate professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times. At the earliest opportunity, and as necessary throughout the inspection, remind both the school and the inspection team of the importance of following the code of conduct.

## Monitoring inspections of schools

We carry out all of our monitoring inspections under [section 8\(2\) of the Education Act 2005](#).

There are 3 types of monitoring inspections for schools:

- monitoring of schools in a category of concern – a school with any evaluation area graded 'urgent improvement' and/or where safeguarding is graded 'not met' will be put into one of the 2

categories of concern: 'requires significant improvement' or 'requires special measures'

- monitoring of schools with any evaluation area graded 'needs attention'
- focused monitoring inspections – this may be when we receive information that causes us concern, for example through a qualifying complaint made to Ofsted or by other means; or when His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) and/or the Secretary of State for Education decide to commission an inspection to look at a particular aspect of provision or practice

Schools that are in a category of concern or have any evaluation area graded 'needs attention' will be subject to a monitoring programme.

## **The monitoring programme**

At the start of a school's monitoring programme, the school is allocated a His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) from the relevant region.

This HMI is responsible for liaising with school leaders, and the nominee. [\[footnote 1\]](#) They are the first point of contact during the monitoring programme and are likely to be the lead inspector of any on-site monitoring inspection(s).

## **Key principles of monitoring**

### **Principle 1**

Throughout the monitoring inspection, the toolkit will help you gather evidence to:

- **celebrate** the improvements leaders have secured since the full inspection
- **validate** leaders' actions and progress
- **highlight** where further improvement may still be needed

## Principle 2

Leadership and governance are always key areas of focus when gathering evidence. Monitoring inspections focus on the effectiveness of leadership and governance in bringing about swift and sustainable improvement, even when this evaluation area has previously been graded as meeting at least the 'expected standard'.

## Principle 3

Monitoring inspections can improve the grade for evaluation areas identified as 'urgent improvement' or 'needs attention'. In these cases, an updated report card will be published. Where the evidence indicates that a grade may need to be lowered, the monitoring inspection is likely to be deemed a full inspection, as the school may require significant improvement or require special measures.<sup>[\[footnote 2\]](#)</sup> Only the evaluation areas graded as 'urgent improvement' or 'needs attention' will be monitored. Use the toolkit to determine whether leaders have made enough progress for the relevant evaluation area to be graded at least at the 'expected standard'.

# **Grade changes following a monitoring inspection**

If you gather enough evidence to support a change in grade during either a monitoring inspection of a school in a category of concern or a school with a 'needs attention' grade, update the report card accordingly.[\[footnote 3\]](#) You must record explicitly where leaders have made improvements and the evidence to support this change in grade. See our schools report-writing guidance on how to update the report card.

## **Removing a school from a category of concern**

Schools in a category of concern may demonstrate improvements in particular evaluation areas during a monitoring inspection. For instance, individual evaluation areas graded as 'urgent improvement' may be regraded to 'needs attention' or higher. While individual evaluation area grades may improve, the statutory designations of 'requires significant improvement' or 'requires special measures' can only be removed following a full section 5 inspection. If monitoring inspection evidence indicates that a school has improved significantly, so that if a full inspection were carried out no evaluation area would be graded 'urgent improvement', the monitoring inspection should be deemed to be a full inspection, or a full inspection should be scheduled at the earliest opportunity.

## **Changing grades from 'needs attention' to 'expected standard'**

Schools with evaluation areas graded as 'needs attention' will normally have a monitoring inspection no later than 24 months after the publication of the report card. Leaders can ask for a monitoring inspection earlier should they feel that they have compelling evidence to support an improvement in grade. This should be submitted in writing to the school's assigned HMI. The decision on whether to carry out an earlier monitoring inspection rests with the relevant Ofsted regional director.

Make sure that you have robust evidence to support a change in grade. Otherwise, the grade will remain as it is. If you have concerns that the school has declined, contact the national duty desk. The monitoring inspection may have to be deemed to be a full inspection, if appropriate, or a full inspection scheduled at the earliest opportunity.

## **Schools where you have concerns about the progress leaders are making or concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or pupils' well-being on a 'needs attention' or 'urgent improvement' monitoring inspection**

In this situation, it is important to call the national duty desk as soon as possible. Discuss the implications of your concerns. Make sure this is recorded carefully in the evidence base.

If, during a monitoring inspection of a school with evaluation areas graded 'needs attention', the evidence shows clearly that if the school were to receive a full inspection it would be likely that one or more evaluation areas would be graded 'urgent improvement', or that safeguarding standards may not be met, the monitoring inspection may need to be deemed to be a full inspection. In this event, inspectors will carry out all the evidence-gathering activities required in a full inspection and a new full inspection report card will be produced.

## **Schools where grades do not change**

Where you do not find evidence to validate that leaders have made the necessary improvements, discuss this with the national duty desk. You may need to consider carefully whether the grade determined for leadership and governance at the last full inspection remains accurate. In particular, you will have to determine whether leaders and those responsible for governance still have the capacity to bring about the changes needed.

In this situation, be clear with school leaders why grades have not changed. Explain that the full inspection report card will be updated to say that the monitoring inspection took place, but that the grade for the evaluation area remains 'urgent improvement' or 'needs attention'.

## **Changing grades on focused monitoring inspections**

Inspectors cannot change a grade on a focused monitoring inspection. If you have serious concerns, for instance about safeguarding, contact the national duty desk. It may be necessary to deem the monitoring inspection to be a full inspection, reporting on all evaluation areas.

## **Monitoring inspections of schools in a category of concern**

## Process outline

For schools placed in a category of concern (either ‘requires significant improvement’ or ‘requires special measures’) following a full inspection, you will carry out:[\[footnote 4\]](#)

- **an introductory monitoring programme call** – this marks the start of contact between you (as the assigned HMI), school leaders and, where applicable, the nominee, which will continue throughout the monitoring programme
- **notification and planning calls** – to set up individual monitoring inspections in the programme
- **on-site monitoring inspections** – monitoring inspections are usually termly; the number of inspections within the monitoring programme will vary depending on the extent of the issues identified at the last full inspection and the category of concern that the school is in:
  - schools that require significant improvement may receive up to 5 on-site monitoring inspections within 18 months of the last full inspection report card being published
  - schools that require special measures may receive up to 6 on-site monitoring inspections within 24 months of the last full inspection report card being published

## Introductory monitoring programme call

The introductory monitoring programme call is the opportunity to start building an enduring relationship with school leaders, and, where applicable, the nominee and to support them through the monitoring programme.

### Determining the time of the call

You should:



- Call the school by 10am, typically within 3 months of the publication of the school's full inspection report card. This call can take place on any day of the week.
- Ask to speak with the headteacher or the most senior member of school staff available.
- Explain that you are the HMI assigned to the monitoring programme and their first point of contact and that this is a short call to organise the introductory monitoring programme call. Share relevant information, such as your name and appropriate contact details.
- Agree and confirm a suitable time for the introductory monitoring programme call, usually later that day. Explain that this is normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this. Agree the arrangements for this.
- Agree who will attend the call. Encourage the headteacher to have at least one other senior leader present to assist and support them in the call and, where applicable, the school's nominee.
- Agree the purpose of the call – that it is to introduce the process of the monitoring programme and to briefly discuss the 'next steps' identified at the previous full inspection.
- As with full inspections, ask whether the staff who will be joining the introductory monitoring programme call require any adaptations and/or reasonable adjustments.

### **Carrying out the introductory monitoring programme call**

You should read the school's full inspection report card before carrying out the introductory monitoring programme call.

Call the school at the agreed time. This is normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this.

Ensure that leaders are clear about why the school is subject to monitoring, highlighting the next steps identified at the previous full inspection. Confirm the specific evaluation areas that will be the focus of monitoring activity and the relevant expected standards that need to be secured.

Explain to leaders:

- that this monitoring programme will continue only for as long as it is required – this will be when the school has improved sufficiently for the category of concern to be removed
- the maximum number of monitoring inspections they can expect:
- schools that require significant improvement may receive up to 5 on-site monitoring inspections within 18 months of the last full inspection report card being published
- schools that require special measures may receive up to 6 on-site monitoring inspections within 24 months of the last full inspection report card being published
- that there will typically be one monitoring inspection per school term
- that the monitoring programme will be reviewed and adjusted during each monitoring inspection
- how the process of deeming an inspection to be a full inspection and removing a school from a category of concern works (see [Checking readiness for removal of a category of concern](#))
- how the focus for the monitoring inspection will be determined
- that they can contact you by email if they have any further questions

During the call:

- discuss with leaders the actions they have already taken to address the next steps and any evidence they have of the impact of these
- discuss any support that they have planned or received, whether external or, where applicable, through the trust, the local authority or a federation, and its impact
- invite them to ask any questions they have about the process

Confirm with leaders that ahead of each monitoring inspection you will notify them up to 5 working days before arriving on site, and that you will arrange a follow-up planning call before you arrive.

## **On-site monitoring inspections**

The school's on-site inspection will be scheduled for up to 2 days. This will depend on the size of the school and the extent of the improvement needed. If you evaluate on a 1-day monitoring inspection that the school is not improving, you may recommend that the next monitoring inspection is completed over 2 days.

The size of the inspection team will depend on the size and context of the school.

## **Preparing for the on-site monitoring inspection**

Review the following, recording only brief and relevant evaluative information that will support a constructive and purposeful planning call:

- the school's full inspection report card, particularly the next steps, and any subsequent report card updates
- any performance information published since the last full inspection
- the local authority or trust's statement of action for the school
- relevant complaints made to Ofsted about the school since the last full inspection
- any updates to Ofsted Parent View since the last full inspection, for example where there have been any significant

changes to the proportion of responses

- any information that you consider relevant from the school's website, for example curriculum information or governance arrangements
- the information on Ofsted's 'Find information about a provider' system, such as [warning notices](#)
- any documentation the school has chosen to provide in advance of the inspection

Consider which evaluation area(s) would be best to prioritise for the monitoring inspection. You are likely to prioritise core issues that impact on pupils' safety, learning and/or well-being. The latest available data should help inform your decisions.

Use your preparation and knowledge of the relevant expected standards in the toolkit evaluations area(s) to identify what you will need to explore in the planning call.

Start to think about the potential monitoring inspection activities that are likely to be suitable and will give the opportunity to gather the most relevant evidence, considering the school's context. Throughout the monitoring inspection(s) you should be alert to any new safeguarding concerns.

## **Notification and planning of the on-site monitoring inspection**

### **The monitoring inspection notification call**

You will usually telephone the school up to 5 working days before the start of the on-site inspection.

Ensure that you follow the relevant notification call script.

Cover the following, referring to the relevant section in the [operating guide for a full inspection](#):

- confirming key school information
- notification of inspection
- scheduling the planning call
- confirming who will take part in the call
- discussing the role of the nominee
- arrangements for adaptations and/or reasonable adjustments

### **The monitoring inspection planning call**

Call the school at the time agreed during the notification call. The planning call for a monitoring inspection is likely to be shorter than the call for a full inspection. However, this will depend on the range of evaluation area(s) and issues that need to be discussed. Typically, it should normally not be longer than 60 minutes overall. You should emphasise to leaders that they can take breaks when needed.

This call follows the same protocols as for full inspections. For example, it will normally be a video conference call and should not be recorded. Refer to the [operating guide for full inspections](#).

The planning call will be in 3 parts:

#### **Part 1: Introduction and discussing practicalities**

This will cover the same range of information as a full inspection. This includes discussion about:

- Ofsted's code of conduct
- leaders' well-being
- reasonable adjustments and adaptations
- ensuring that leaders are clear about the purpose and focus of the monitoring inspection and have what they need, such as details on how to upload documents to the portal

Invite school leaders to let parents and carers know about the monitoring inspection and to access Ofsted Parent View. You

should consider views expressed on Ofsted Parent View during the inspection.

Where a school requires special measures or requires significant improvement, consider whether it would be useful to use pupil and staff surveys. You may also request that the free-text facility for Ofsted Parent View is opened. Let leaders know that the school will receive a link to the surveys in their notification letter. Ask that they encourage pupils and staff to complete them.

## **Part 2: The school's context, leaders' actions and their impact**

Discuss:

- your pre-inspection preparation
- any changes to the school's context since the last full inspection and/or monitoring inspection that leaders should share with you, including in relation to pupils' needs
- any changes to leadership and governance arrangements since the last inspection/monitoring inspection
- reference to the outcome of previous monitoring inspection(s) where applicable
- leaders' evaluation of the actions they have taken to address the evaluation area(s) that are graded 'urgent improvement', and how they have assessed the impact of their actions
- any support they have received and its impact
- the evaluation areas that will form the core focus of this monitoring inspection – remember, you will not have time to look at everything; where there is a programme of monitoring, not all evaluation areas have to be covered in each on-site inspection

## **Part 3: Planning the timetable for the monitoring inspection**

The purpose of this part of the call is to work with leaders to shape the plan for the inspection. Discuss the focus for the

inspection, remembering that core issues should be prioritised – particularly those where leaders are likely to demonstrate impact quickly.

Consider and plan with leaders what inspection activities you (and the team if there is one) need to carry out to gather the necessary evidence to:

- **celebrate** the improvements leaders have secured since the full inspection
- **validate** leaders' actions and progress
- **highlight** where further improvement may still be needed

When you start to shape the timetable, consider:

- your arrival time, remembering that this should not be before 8am
- a brief meeting to check on staff well-being at the start of the day and to review the proposed timetable and inspection activity arrangements
- whether leaders would welcome the opportunity for the inspection team, where applicable, to meet briefly with staff at the start of the day
- which inspection activities you will carry out in the morning – these depend on the evaluation area(s) that are the focus of the inspection, and typically include:
- a focused leadership meeting followed by a learning walk where leaders can evidence the impact of their school improvement work 'on the ground'
- further focused leadership meetings and subsequent learning walks to focus on key aspects of an evaluation area that requires urgent improvement
- case sampling, as necessary
- where staffing has changed since the last full inspection, checking the single central record

- afternoon activities, which will include relevant follow-up activities
- time to reflect on and record your evidence
- the start time of any reflection meeting(s) – see the [operating guide for full inspections](#) for further information on who can attend the reflection meeting(s)
- arranging a suitable time to meet with relevant senior leaders, those responsible for governance and trust leaders/local authority representatives
- time to analyse the responses to Ofsted Parent View and any staff or pupil surveys, where applicable
- arrangements for the final reflection meeting and final feedback meeting at the end of the monitoring inspection (see the [inspection information document](#) for who may attend); ask the school to invite the appropriate people to the final feedback meeting

You should leave the school by 5pm other than in exceptional circumstances – for example, if leaders request a meeting with a trust member after 5pm due to their availability. When any request to stay beyond 5pm is made, whether by school leaders or the inspection team, discuss this with leaders and record brief notes in the evidence base.

When deciding which activities to carry out, remember that these are not full inspections, so you need to consider how best to gather specific information about the evaluation areas you are focusing on. Activities should be focused, purposeful and link directly to the relevant evidence-gathering themes and standards in the toolkit.

Use the toolkit to plan inspection activities relevant to the focus evaluation area(s). For example, if attendance was identified as an issue at the previous inspection, you should meet with the leader(s) with oversight for attendance; or if inclusion was graded below ‘expected standard’, you should carry out an inclusion-focused learning walk and case sampling.



Identify the first-hand evidence needed to evaluate progress, drawing on the earlier discussion with leaders about actions and impact.

Discuss with leaders how and where they can best demonstrate the positive impact and successes of their work, including how they have sustained improvements from previous monitoring inspections.

Refer to [Additional guidance to support evidence-gathering](#) in the operating guide for full inspections to inform your planning of inspection activities.

On a 2-day monitoring inspection, focus your discussion with leaders on how to gather evidence that helps you and the inspection team to analyse the specific issue(s) that is/are holding back swifter and/or more sustainable improvement.

Consider how evidence gathered from activities such as learning walks can be used to support any other evaluation area(s) that are the focus of the inspection. Think about how activities can help you check that leaders are sustaining the positive impact of their actions from one monitoring inspection to the next as the school moves through its improvement journey.

Make sure that you share and explain the rationale for inspection activities, discussing any practical arrangements as required, and record this in your evidence base. The final decision on inspection activities rests with you as lead inspector. Be clear that you will ensure leaders have the opportunity to highlight the impact of their actions since the last full inspection/monitoring inspection.

Remember to schedule brief ongoing reflection meetings so that the nominee and other leaders remain updated on progress and emerging findings. Emphasise to leaders that the reflection meetings will provide the opportunity to review emerging findings and to agree adjustments to the planned inspection activities.

Agree a time when you will be able to upload the draft timetable to the portal. End the call and upload the timetable to the portal by the agreed time.

### **After the call(s)**

Use electronic evidence-gathering (EEG) to inform team inspectors (where relevant) of any pertinent information, including the planned activities, their responsibilities, and the outcome of any requested adaptations or reasonable adjustments.

## **What to do on site during the monitoring inspection**

Monitoring inspections are scheduled for either 1 or 2 days.

### **Day 1**

When you arrive on site, you should:

- check on the well-being of the school leaders and staff and find out whether any issues have arisen since the planning call
- hold a brief meeting with the inspection team (where relevant) to ensure that the team inspectors understand the school's context and the purpose of the inspection
- hold a short orientation meeting with the headteacher and nominee to confirm the inspection schedule, the frequency of reflection meetings and the evaluation areas you are focusing on
- check whether anyone involved in the inspection requires or has requested any reasonable adjustments because of a disability
- consider whether you need to make any adaptations to the inspection process where those with protected characteristics may otherwise be put at a disadvantage (refer to the [Responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or](#)

[adaptations](#) section of the main operating guide for further information)

- if there have been any requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations, record them in the evidence base along with their outcome, and any other adaptations that have been requested

Follow the timetable and organisation for the day as discussed in the planning call.

### **Reflection meetings with leaders and the nominee**

These meetings bring together the inspection team, leaders and the nominee (if there is one) to reflect on the emerging evidence. You should:

- check on the well-being of leaders and staff, and allow leaders and/or the nominee to raise any issues or concerns or seek clarification, including about the conduct of the inspection or of individual inspectors
- ensure you have applied the [3 key principles](#) when evaluating the first-hand evidence you have gathered
- consider which areas are emerging as having improved since the last full inspection, and areas where the school may have more to do – this will support you in having a transparent dialogue with leaders about the emerging evidence
- identify the most appropriate inspection activities to gather any further evidence required
- review the plans for the rest of the day, agreeing any changes to the planned inspection activities to make sure that they enable you to form a clear picture of progress across the toolkit evaluations areas being considered on this monitoring inspection

### **End of day 1 reflection meeting with leaders and the nominee (only for 1-day inspections)**

During the end of day reflection meeting:

- check on the well-being of leaders and staff, and allow leaders and/or the nominee to raise any issues or concerns or seek clarification, including about the conduct of the inspection or of individual inspectors
- ensure you have applied the 3 key principles when evaluating the first-hand evidence you have gathered
- evaluate the evidence for the specific evaluation area(s) that the monitoring inspection is focused on
- confirm whether the school is making the progress that it should towards the category of concern being removed
- where relevant, consider whether any provisional changes are needed to the subsequent monitoring programme, including (for 1-day inspections) whether a 2-day monitoring inspection is needed next time

### **End of day 1 reflection meeting with leaders and the nominee (only for 2-day monitoring inspections)**

On 2-day inspections, hold a reflection meeting with leaders at the end of day 1 to:

- check on the well-being of leaders and staff, and on the inspection process and the conduct of those involved in the inspection; resolve any issues
- share headline evidence, linked to the relevant expected standards in the toolkit
- record leaders' comments in the evidence base
- identify and agree on the necessary inspection activities for the relevant evaluation area(s) in the toolkit, ensuring leaders understand the rationale for these
- discuss and arrange the practical arrangements for the agreed inspection activities on day 2

### **Day 2 (only for 2-day inspections)**

As with day 1, begin the day with a brief reflection meeting with the headteacher or nominee: confirm everyone's well-being, note any updates from leaders or unexpected events, and agree

whether the timetable needs fine-tuning to fit the school's working day. Adjust plans where necessary.

Continue to carry out the agreed inspection activities, remembering to have regular reflection meetings.

Once evidence collection has been completed, the inspection team will hold a reflection meeting. Leaders will be present.

### **End of day 2 reflection meeting with leaders and the nominee (only for 2-day inspections)**

In the reflection meeting:

- feed back on the evidence gathered on day 2
- evaluate all evidence gathered over the 2 days in each relevant evaluation area
- confirm whether the school is making the progress that it should towards the category of concern being removed
- where relevant, consider whether any provisional changes are needed to the subsequent monitoring programme, including where a 2-day inspection is needed
- record the nominee's comments in the evidence base

You will then hold the final feedback meeting.

### **Final feedback meeting for 1- and 2-day inspections**

Record the outcome and the main points for feedback to the school in the evidence base during the inspection.

Your feedback must be clear, respectful and grounded in the evidence gathered. It must cover all the points that will appear in the updated report card. Remind those present that the report card will be updated on the school's webpage.

Thank everyone for their contributions, engagement and involvement in the inspection and then explain clearly to all attendees:

- that attendance at the final feedback meeting is voluntary and

any attendee may leave at any time

- the key findings from the inspection, including the range of evidence gathered
- that leaders should share the inspection findings with all governors/trustees, and whoever else they consider appropriate, which may include colleagues, family members, and/or their wider support group; however, the information should not be made public or shared with parents
- that the draft monitoring inspection report card they receive must not be published; they must wait for the copy of the final monitoring inspection report card
- that when they receive their draft report card and complete their factual accuracy check they do not need to check data from other published sources, but may want to review any data that was gathered on inspection or commented on in the report card
- that the headteacher should, ideally, complete the post-inspection survey
- that the school has an opportunity to raise any issues or concerns or to seek clarification about the inspection, and can contact us after the end of the inspection if necessary (see the [Concerns or complaints about an inspection](#) section in the inspection information for state-funded schools)
- that leaders can make a formal complaint and can find information on how to do this is in our [complaints procedure](#)
- the impact of any external support the school has received
- whether or not the school is making the progress that it needs to for the category of concern to be removed
- that the text of the written update may differ from the verbal feedback, but the inspection outcome will not change unless quality assurance deems that appropriate
- where applicable, any provisional changes to the school's monitoring programme – but make clear that this is also subject to quality assurance


Reflect the school's context and frame your feedback through professional dialogue, with the aim of supporting improvement. When managing attendees and the conduct of everyone who attends, make sure that the meeting is practical and constructive.

## **Checking readiness for removal of a category of concern**

When conducting an inspection under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI has the power, under section 9 of the act, to treat that inspection as if it were a full inspection.

You can deem any monitoring inspection to be a full inspection as soon as you are confident the school has improved sufficiently and is ready for its category of concern designation to be removed, which may be earlier than the fifth or sixth monitoring inspection. This will be the case when you have gathered robust evidence to demonstrate that, if the school were to receive a full inspection, no evaluation area would be graded 'urgent improvement'. This evidence may be gathered over one or more monitoring inspections, as the school progresses through its improvement journey. When a monitoring inspection is deemed to be a full inspection, a full inspection report card with a new set of grades for all evaluation areas will be produced and published.

If, through the monitoring programme, the school continues to be in a category of concern, the fifth monitoring inspection for a school that requires significant improvement or the sixth monitoring inspection for a school that requires special measures will focus on checking the school's readiness to come out of a category of concern.



If you consider that the school is ready to be removed from a category of concern, you must call the national duty desk before making your decision.

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If you deem the inspection to be a full inspection, this will then be completed using the [operating guide for full inspections](#).

If the school is not ready in its final monitoring inspection for the inspection to be deemed a full inspection, then its next inspection will be a full inspection, likely to be conducted by a new lead HMI. This will typically take place during the term following the end of the monitoring programme. This needs to be made clear to leaders and the nominee at the final feedback meeting.

## **What to do after the monitoring inspection**

### **Reporting on improvements**

Following each monitoring inspection, use the schools report-writing guidance to produce an updated report card, unless the inspection has been deemed a full inspection.

Update the following sections:

- ‘About this inspection’
- ‘About this school’ (where appropriate)
- ‘What it’s like to be a pupil at this school’ – update only the paragraphs pertinent to the evaluation areas being focused on
- Each evaluation area that has been focused on

If the school submits comments during the factual accuracy check, you are responsible for reviewing and responding to these comments and making any necessary amendments, as set out in the schools report-writing guidance.



# Monitoring inspections of schools with any evaluation area(s) graded 'needs attention'

## Process outline

For schools with evaluation areas graded 'needs attention' following a full inspection, inspectors will carry out the following:

- **introductory monitoring call** – this marks the start of contact between you (as the assigned HMI), school leaders and, where applicable, the nominee, which will continue throughout the monitoring programme.
- **ongoing monitoring calls** – these are to maintain ongoing contact between the HMI, school leaders and the nominee. They are used to check in on progress and evaluate readiness for the on-site monitoring inspection(s). The frequency of these calls will be determined by the HMI and school leaders/the nominee.
- **notification and planning calls** – these are to set up individual monitoring inspections in the programme.
- **on-site monitoring inspection** – the specific inspection programme will vary depending on the extent of the issues identified at the last full inspection – the vast majority of schools will only receive 1 monitoring inspection.

## Introductory monitoring programme call

The introductory monitoring call is the opportunity to start building an enduring relationship with school leaders and the nominee to support them towards their monitoring inspection.

### **Determining the time of the call**

You should:

- Call the school by 10am, typically within 3 months of the publication of the school's full inspection report. These calls can take place on any day of the working week.
- Ask to speak with the headteacher or the most senior member of school staff available.
- Explain that you are the HMI assigned to the monitoring programme and their first point of contact and that this is a short call to organise the introductory monitoring programme call. Share relevant information such as your name and appropriate contact details.
- Agree and confirm a suitable time for the introductory monitoring call, usually later that day. Explain that this is normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this. Agree with the headteacher the arrangements for this.
- Agree who will attend the call. Encourage the headteacher to have at least one other senior leader present to assist and support them in the call and, where available, the school's nominee.
- Agree the purpose of the call – that it is to introduce the process of the monitoring programme and to briefly discuss the 'next steps' identified at the previous full inspection.
- As with full inspections, ask whether the staff who will be joining the introductory monitoring call require any adaptations and/or reasonable adjustments.

### **Carrying out the introductory monitoring programme call**

You should read the full inspection report card before carrying out the introductory monitoring call.

Call the school at the agreed time. This is normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this.

Ensure that leaders are clear about why the school is subject to monitoring, highlighting the next steps identified at the previous full inspection.

Explain to leaders that:

- they will normally only receive 1 monitoring inspection
- the monitoring inspection will take place no later than 24 months after the publication of the school's report card for the previous full inspection
- leaders can ask for a monitoring inspection earlier if they feel that they have compelling evidence to support an improvement in grade; they should submit their request to you in writing – the decision on whether to carry out an earlier monitoring inspection rests with the relevant Ofsted regional director
- the monitoring inspection will focus on the evaluation areas graded 'needs attention', and the next steps from the previous full inspection – if there are multiple areas, explain which ones you will be focusing on
- if identified evaluation areas have improved sufficiently and there is tangible evidence to support this, they may be graded as 'expected standard' or higher during the monitoring inspection and an updated report card produced
- they can ask any questions they have about the process
- they can contact you by email should they have any further questions
- you will follow up by email to organise additional ongoing calls – these will typically take place at least once every term

During the call, discuss with leaders:

- the actions that they have already taken to address the next steps, and the impact of these

- any support that they have received, whether external or through the trust, and its impact
- the circumstances in which a monitoring inspection may be deemed to be a full inspection

Confirm with leaders that you will contact them to notify them of the inspection up to 5 working days before arriving on site, and that you will arrange a follow-up planning call before you arrive.

## Ongoing calls

Call the school at the previously agreed time and date. This is normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this.

These calls are to maintain ongoing contact between the HMI, school leaders and the nominee. They are used to check in on progress and assess readiness for the on-site inspection(s).

Some schools with 'needs attention' grades will be part of the regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) programme, run by the Department for Education (DfE).

During the call, discuss with leaders:

- the actions they have already taken to address the next steps, and their impact
- the progress leaders are already making to secure the expected standard in any evaluation area(s) graded 'needs attention' at the last full inspection
- any support that they have received, including through the RISE programme, and its impact
- if the school is not ready for an on-site inspection, the scope and timing of further ongoing calls, how these will be arranged, and who will attend

When you agree the school is ready, confirm with leaders that you will contact them to notify the school of the inspection up to 5 working days before arriving on site, and that you will arrange a follow-up planning call before you arrive.

## **On-site monitoring inspections**

On-site monitoring inspections will usually last 1 day with 1 inspector. Occasionally, for example due to the size of the school or the number of evaluation areas graded 'needs attention', they may last 2 days and/or there may be additional team inspectors.

## **Notification and planning of the on-site monitoring inspection**

You will usually telephone the school up to 5 working days before the start of the on-site monitoring inspection. The timing of the school's monitoring inspection will largely depend on the priorities identified for improvement at the school's full inspection and on leaders' readiness to present robust evidence of improvement. The on-site inspection will take place no later than 24 months from the publication of the full inspection report. The precise timing will depend on the progress leaders are making to address the 'next steps' identified at the time of the full inspection.

### **The monitoring inspection notification call**

Ensure that you follow the relevant notification call script.

Cover the following, referring to the relevant section in the [operating guide for a full inspection](#):

- confirming key school information, including relevant

personnel for the purpose of the monitoring inspection

- speaking with senior leaders/the nominee
- notification of inspection
- scheduling the planning call
- discussing the role of the nominee
- arrangements for adaptations and/or reasonable adjustments

### **The monitoring inspection planning call**

The planning call will be shorter than it would be for a full inspection – no more than 60 minutes. However, this will depend on the range of evaluation area(s) and issues that need to be discussed.

Call the school at the time agreed during the notification call. This call follows the same protocols as for full inspections. For example, it will normally be a video conference call and should not be recorded. Refer to the [operating guide for full inspections](#).

In your discussions with leaders, you must:

- check on the headteacher's and any other leaders' well-being
- confirm the date of the monitoring inspection
- remind them of Ofsted's code of conduct and where to access it
- agree and confirm an outline schedule and timings for the monitoring inspection, including any meetings with relevant staff/governors or pupils and regular reflection meetings with the headteacher and nominee
- explain that the on-site inspection will start with a meeting with leaders to discuss the progress made in addressing the evaluation area(s) identified as needing attention
- agree and confirm key information you will require around the evaluation areas graded as 'needing attention' – this information should be succinct, relevant and pertinent to the

evaluation areas being considered on the monitoring inspection; be clear about any information that needs to be made available at the start of the monitoring inspection

- make arrangements for any adaptations and reasonable adjustments

Note that there will be no local authority or trust statement of action to review.

Invite school leaders to let parents know about the inspection and how to access Ofsted Parent View. You should consider views expressed on Ofsted Parent View during the inspection.

On 'needs attention' monitoring inspections, surveys of pupils and staff are not normally used. You should, of course, engage with staff and pupils during the monitoring inspection. However, if you and/or leaders consider there are other specific circumstances on the monitoring inspection that mean it would be helpful to open the staff and pupil surveys, and/or the free-text facility on Ofsted Parent View, contact the national duty desk for approval.

### **Planning the inspection schedule**

Discuss with leaders the inspection activities you and the team need to carry out to gather the necessary evidence to:

- **celebrate** the improvements leaders have secured since the full inspection
- **validate** leaders' actions and progress
- **highlight** where further improvement may still be needed

When you start to shape your timetable, consider:

- arrival time, remembering that this should not be before 8am
- whether or not leaders would welcome the opportunity for you to meet briefly with staff at the start of the day
- arrangements for the initial focused leadership meeting

- activities to be organised, depending on the evaluation area(s) that are the focus on the inspection, which may include:
  - a leadership learning walk where leaders can gather evidence on the impact of their school improvement work
  - a focused leadership meeting with the leader(s) who have oversight of the specific evaluation area(s) that are graded 'needs attention', and a subsequent learning walk to see the impact of their actions on the ground
  - meeting with pupils; for example, where attendance was an issue, meeting pupils whose attendance has improved as a result of leaders' actions since the previous inspection
- meeting with staff, for example to discuss the impact of the professional learning programme, if this had contributed to the 'needs attention' grading of the leadership and governance evaluation area
- the inspection activities to be carried out, discussing with leaders any necessary practical arrangements; activities should be focused, purposeful and link directly with the next steps highlighted in the last full inspection report card
- your rationale for the inspection activities you have selected, noting this in your evidence base; the final decision on inspection activities rests with you as lead inspector
- scheduling regular brief reflection meetings to keep the headteacher, nominee and other leaders updated on progress and emerging findings throughout the monitoring inspection
- time to reflect on and record your evidence
- arranging a suitable time to meet with those relevant senior leaders, those responsible for governance and trust leaders/local authority representatives, if this is required
- time for you to write the updated report card while on site – it is important to factor in enough time to update the specific section of the report card; details of this are included in the schools report-writing guidance



- time to feed back your findings to leaders and governors

Ask the school to invite the appropriate people to the final feedback meeting at the end of the inspection (see the [inspection information for schools](#) for who may attend).

You should leave the school by 5pm other than in exceptional circumstances – for example, if leaders request a meeting with a trust member after 5pm due to their availability. (When any request to stay beyond 5pm is made either by leaders or the inspection team, discuss with leaders and record brief notes in the evidence base.)

### **After the call(s)**

Use the EEG preparation card to inform team inspectors (where relevant) of any pertinent information, including the planned activities, their responsibilities, and the details of any requested adaptations or reasonable adjustments.

## **What to do on site during a monitoring inspection**

### **Arrival**

You should use your professional judgement to determine what time to arrive on site. This will likely be at the start of the school day, but no earlier than 8am.

### **Initial meeting with school leaders/the nominee**

The initial meeting at the start of the inspection is about celebrating the progress leaders have made, and for them to signpost where you might find the evidence to support this. This is your opportunity to hear about actions they have taken since the full inspection, the impact of these and the evidence available to support their own self-evaluation.

Activities need to be planned very carefully. You have limited time. In this meeting, you should confirm with leaders that the

planned inspection activities provide opportunities to check their evaluation of the impact of their actions since the last full inspection. You need to have time to validate what you are being told and what you are seeing, and to highlight anything that still needs to improve. It is important that you do not spend all of the available time during the inspection looking at documents, data or talking to leaders. You will need to be able to validate what they are saying, by seeing the school in operation first hand and 'on the ground'.

In this meeting you should:

- explain the focus and purpose of the monitoring inspection and the process
- check that relevant leaders are present
- remind all present of Ofsted's code of conduct
- check on the well-being of the headteacher, other leaders and staff
- check on whether any adaptations and reasonable adjustments are needed
- check that leaders have invited the appropriate people to the final feedback meeting at the end of the inspection

You should discuss:

- any changes to the school's context since the last full inspection that leaders should share with you, including in relation to pupils' needs
- any changes to leadership and governance arrangements since the last inspection
- the outcome of any previous monitoring inspections, where applicable
- leaders' progress in addressing the evaluation area(s) identified as needing attention, how they have assessed the impact of their actions, and any relevant evidence to support this

- any support that they have received and its impact
- the proposed timetable and inspection activity arrangements – agree and confirm that the scheduled activities provide the right focus to enable you to validate what leaders are saying, making changes as needed

Allow some flexibility in the timing of this meeting. For example, it may need to be in 2 parts to allow for you to speak with pupils at the start of the day, or other relevant activities.

### **Reflection meetings**

During the day, plan in opportunities to keep leaders up to date with what you are finding. Agree changes to the schedule if needed to ensure leaders have the opportunity to provide evidence of the impact of their work.

### **Reflection and writing time for the inspector(s)**

Set aside time in the afternoon to reflect, ensure that your evidence base is complete, and check that you have robust evidence to support your emerging findings.

You will need to update the relevant sections of the school's report card. Use the schools report-writing guidance. Update the following sections:

- 'About this inspection'
- 'About this school' (where appropriate)
- 'What's it like to be a pupil at this school' – update only paragraphs pertinent to the evaluation areas being focused on
- the evaluation areas being focused on

### **Final feedback meeting**

Follow the guidance for [inspections of schools in a category of concern](#). Adapt your feedback to discuss:

- the key findings from this monitoring inspection and, where relevant, the updated provisional grades for each evaluation area(s), which may change as a result of quality assurance

procedures or moderation

- the rationale and key evidence supporting each updated provisional grade or an explanation of why the evidence does not support an updated provisional grade, using the language of the toolkit
- if relevant, the timing of the next full inspection

Remember to outline any provisional changes to the school's monitoring programme, where applicable.

It is important that you leave the school site by 5pm.

## **What to do after the monitoring inspection**

If leaders submit comments following your written update, you are responsible for reviewing and responding to these comments, and making any necessary amendments, as set out in the schools report-writing guidance.

## **Focused monitoring inspections of schools**

Under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005, Ofsted can carry out inspections to follow up concerns about schools that are not in a category of concern.

We may be asked to inspect any school at any time, including where there are concerns that the safety of pupils and/or staff is at risk, when information suggests that there has been a serious breakdown in leadership and governance, or there has been a significant decline in standards of education and/or care. Equally, we may inspect any school, at any time, at the discretion


of HMCI, or if requested by the Secretary of State for Education.

Focused monitoring inspections focus sharply on the issues that have prompted the inspection. You will not determine grades for any evaluation areas.

Focused monitoring inspections are normally 1 day with 1 inspector, but sometimes a larger team is required and/or the inspection may take place over 2 days.

## **Preparation**

Where relevant, you must review the outcomes of any investigations carried out in line with HMCI's power to investigate qualifying complaints about schools under section 11A of the Education Act 2005, or any other information shared with Ofsted. Contact your regional senior HMI to ensure you have access to all the relevant information and discuss what will be communicated to the school when they are notified of the inspection.



Do not investigate any complaint. You will only be considering wider aspects of the school relevant to the complaint.

Where relevant, review the commission provided by HMCI or the Secretary of State for Education.

You should read the full inspection report card.

## **Notification**

Whether notification is given or not will be decided by the

regional director in advance of the inspection.

### **Monitoring inspections with notice**

If you are undertaking a focused monitoring inspection with notice, notify the school the day before the inspection, typically before midday. Make the purpose of the inspection clear during this call.

### **Monitoring inspections without notice**

If you are carrying out a focused monitoring inspection without notice, you should normally telephone the school about 15 minutes before arriving on site. Advise the headteacher (or senior leader) that you will ensure that the focus of the inspection and the reasons that led to it will be made clear after you/the inspection team have arrived at the school.

## **Notification and planning for an announced focused monitoring inspection**

When the focused inspection is carried out with notice, follow the guidance for [Monitoring inspections of schools in a category of concern](#) about the notification and planning call.

When considering context, leaders' actions and their impact (part 2), adapt your discussion to focus on:

- the purpose of the inspection and the wider issues raised by any complaint(s), where relevant, without identifying specific complainants
- leaders' actions and the impact of the work in relation to the evaluation area(s) that link to the wider issues that are the focus of the inspection

When planning the timetable (part 3):

- use the possible whole-school issues that you have identified

from your preparation and the toolkit to identify the activities that will help you gather the evidence needed

- discuss your proposed activities with school leaders, ensuring you remain flexible throughout

## **Carrying out an unannounced focused monitoring inspection**

For unannounced focused monitoring inspections, you will need to plan a skeleton timetable in advance without input from leaders. Follow part 3 of [Planning the timetable for the monitoring inspection](#).

When planning the timetable, be aware that:

- staff and those responsible for governance may only be available at certain times
- you will need to observe the start of the school day – explain this to leaders and let them know you will meet with them to explain the reasons for the inspection once this activity is complete

## **What to do on site during the focused monitoring inspection**

Carry out the activities that you identified when planning the timetable for the inspection. Where the wider issues relate to safeguarding, refer to [Evaluating safeguarding in practice](#), as set out in the operating guide for full inspections.

Be aware that some inspections may begin with a safeguarding focus but expand to cover leadership and governance and other relevant evaluation areas. Use your professional judgement to

determine the scope of the inspection and ensure that leaders are kept informed from the outset about any emerging themes.

Once you have decided on the key areas of focus and relevant inspection activities, consider their prioritisation, format and timing. Whether the focused monitoring inspection is scheduled over 1 or 2 days will inform your decisions. It is important that you find first-hand evidence to validate what leaders are telling you.

Remember to schedule regular reflection meetings with leaders and the inspection team.

Schedule in time to assimilate your evaluative evidence.

### **Final feedback meeting**

Follow the guidance for [Monitoring inspections of schools in a category of concern](#). Adapt your feedback to discuss:

- the issues, where relevant, brought to Ofsted's attention that caused the school to be inspected, without identifying or discussing where the concerns came from
- the key findings from the focused monitoring inspection, which are still subject to change as a result of quality assurance procedures or moderation

Remember that unless you deem this inspection to be a full inspection, you cannot change any grades. Remind leaders that, unless the inspection has been deemed a full inspection, the school's next inspection will be 4 years after the publication of its report card.

## **What to do after the focused monitoring inspection**

Update the report card as applicable.



Use the schools report-writing guidance to draft your updated report card.

Review and amend as necessary following any comments from the school.

Remember that unless you deem this inspection to be a full inspection, you cannot change any grades.

## **Deeming a focused monitoring inspection to be a full inspection**

If, during a focused monitoring inspection, inspectors find evidence that the school may be graded 'urgent improvement' for any evaluation area, or that the safeguarding standards may not be met, they may deem the inspection to be a full inspection or recommend that a full inspection be brought forward. You must call the national duty desk before making any decision.

If you deem the inspection to be a full inspection, this will be completed using the [operating guide for full inspections](#).

In this instance, inspectors will look at all evaluation areas and a full section 5 inspection report card, with a new set of grades, will be produced and published. This could result in the school being placed in a category of concern.

## **Deferring or pausing an inspection, or gathering additional evidence**

Familiarise yourself with our guide on [deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence](#). If you receive a request for a

deferral before any on-site monitoring inspection, you must contact the national duty desk.

## Recording evidence

You must record evidence as set out in the [operating guide for full inspections](#).

## Quality assurance and consistency checking

You are responsible for the quality of your own work and that of your team, where applicable.

As the lead inspector, you are responsible for giving any team inspectors timely feedback on the quality of their work and their conduct.

## Additional guidance on evidence-gathering and other matters

Refer to the sections [Additional guidance to support evidence-gathering](#) and [Other matters](#) in the operating guide for full inspections. This guidance also includes information that you may need to refer to, for example if the school uses any alternative provision, has a religious character, or has a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

# **Annex: monitoring inspections of schools that were graded requires improvement or placed in a category of concern before the launch of the renewed education inspection framework**

## **Schools that were placed in a category of concern**

This section applies to schools which, by the end of October 2025, were judged to be a school causing concern – those that:

- require special measures; or
- have serious weaknesses (requires significant improvement)

Schools in a category of concern will be at different stages of their improvement journey. For instance, one school in special measures may not yet have had any monitoring inspections, while another may be approaching its fourth or fifth.

## **Introductory monitoring call**

You should call the school approximately 6 to 9 months after the school's last inspection, **but not before January 2026**.

In the introductory call:

- begin to establish or continue the relationship between the HMI leading the monitoring programme and the school
- explain that they will be monitored using the renewed EIF and toolkit
- clarify the evolving focus of monitoring, where applicable, to reflect the evaluation areas under the renewed EIF
- agree and communicate the likely timing of the next monitoring inspection

Following the introductory call, you will use your professional judgement to determine the best way forward for the school, in consultation with leaders. Discuss the school's circumstances and your proposed way forward with your senior HMI.

## On-site inspection

Follow the instructions set out in the section [on-site inspections for schools causing concern](#), but note the following differences in the process:

- Based on the previously identified weaknesses and areas for improvement, use the most relevant evaluation areas in the toolkit to gather focused evidence to celebrate the improvements leaders have secured since the full inspection, validate leaders' actions and highlight where further improvement may still be needed.
- Do not grade any evaluation areas. These schools have not yet had a full inspection under the renewed EIF. They therefore have no report card. Set out your findings in the monitoring inspection report, with particular focus on the effectiveness of the actions leaders and governors have taken to improve the school. The letter will be subject to standard quality assurance arrangements under the renewed

EIF.

# Schools that were graded requires improvement

Any school whose overall effectiveness was previously graded ‘requires improvement’, or with key areas graded ‘requires improvement’, will not receive a monitoring inspection under the renewed education inspection framework (EIF). It will receive a full inspection within 2.5 years from the publication of the last graded inspection report.

- 1. Details of the role of the nominee are set out in the [inspection information for state-funded schools](#). ↩
- 2. When a monitoring inspection is deemed to be a full inspection, it is treated as it if it were a full inspection under [section 5 of the Education Act 2005](#). ↩
- 3. We will provide an updated version of the inspection report card. It will be clear what has changed. The previous version of the full inspection report card will be available on our website. ↩
- 4. This applies to schools that received their full inspection under the renewed education inspection framework (EIF) from November 2025. ↩

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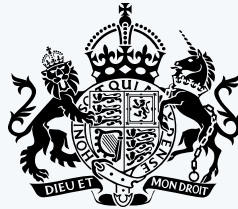
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