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Guidance

# Operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent schools: for use from January 2026

Updated 5 November 2025

**Applies to England**

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**For use on inspections from January 2026.**

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# About this page

This guidance sets out how lead inspectors ('you') and team inspectors should carry out standard inspections of non-association independent schools. It also applies when the Department for Education (DfE) commissions us to carry out a standard inspection of a school that is normally inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

Inspectors should use the guidance in this document and [the toolkit](#), along with their professional curiosity and compassion, to gather evidence to reach fair and accurate grades. They should also draw on their experience and expertise.

Information for inspectors on how to carry out pre-registration, material change, emergency and progress monitoring inspections is in our separate [handbook for additional inspections of non-association independent schools](#).

# Conduct

Throughout the inspection, you must act in line with our [code of conduct](#), and show 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.

# Key principles

## Principle 1

- Throughout the inspection, the toolkit will help you gather evidence to celebrate the school's strengths, validate leaders' priorities and progress and highlight where improvement is needed. In doing so, you will consider the extent to which pupils:
  - achieve – academically and personally
  - belong – feel that they belong to and are valued as part of the school community, so that they attend, behave and contribute positively to what the school offers
  - thrive – benefit from the right systems, processes and levels of oversight, so that they are kept safe and are able to flourish, whatever their background or individual needs

The toolkit will give you assurance that you are building a clear and typical picture of all aspects of the school's work.

## Principle 2

- Leadership, inclusion and whether there is an open and positive safeguarding culture are key areas of focus when gathering evidence.

## Principle 3

- The 'expected standard' in the evaluation areas in the toolkit is the starting point for planning your inspection activities, including checking compliance with the independent school standards (ISS).[\[footnote 1\]](#)

# What to do before arriving on site

## Preparing for inspection

Preparation is a vital part of ensuring that the inspection is a positive experience. Being focused and proportionate is key. You may wish to review some information briefly before your first phone call with leaders to notify the inspection and return to this later in the day to review the information in more detail before the planning call.

When preparing, consider the [3 key principles](#).

Review the following, and record brief, relevant, evaluative information:

- the school's previous standard inspection report and any subsequent additional [inspection reports](#) (including, where relevant, the boarding and early years inspection reports)
- the school's case record [\[footnote 2\]](#)
- information on our 'Find information about a provider' system
- the school's website, so that you can check the identity of the proprietor and compliance with any requirements of the ISS that are possible to check before arriving on site (particularly in relation to the curriculum in part 1 of the standards, the safeguarding policy in part 3, and 'provision of information' in part 6)
- the school's governance arrangements
- information from associated providers, such as registered early years provision; if the school is part of a group of independent schools, review any relevant information from recent inspections of these schools, such as any reported

evidence about the suitability and capability of the proprietor

Also consider any information provided by the DfE, in particular:

- any specific focus for the inspection, in the inspection commissioning form (ICF), where the DfE has commissioned a brought-forward inspection or an additional inspection that will form part of the standard inspection<sup>[footnote 3]</sup>
- the school's census returns
- information on the school's registration status as recorded on the DfE's register, such as the number and age range of pupils that the school is registered to take, whether the school has a religious character or ethos, the name of the proprietor, whether the school is section 41 approved, and whether the school operates from any additional sites<sup>[footnote 4]</sup>

Review briefly the following publicly available information (and where relevant, record brief and evaluative points):

- the main findings from the relevant [area special educational needs and/or disabilities \(SEND\) inspection](#), including (where relevant) arrangements for identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of young children with SEND
- the most recent inspection report on the relevant [local authority children's services](#)
- responses to Ofsted's [Parent View](#) survey
- any further relevant information on the school's website
- the [register of licensed sponsors for student and child student visas](#)
- recent information reported in the press or online
- where the school is co-located with a registered child and adolescent mental health service provider, the most recent Care Quality Commission report
- information published by local authorities, the DfE and the police

Use your preparation and knowledge of all the ISS and the independent school toolkit to identify what to explore with leaders in the planning call.

## **Checking for complaints about schools**

When preparing for an inspection, review and consider any complaints that the DfE has asked us to consider about the school and/or any other complaints recorded on 'Find information about a provider'. Record the themes raised and, in the light of all other available information, decide how to adapt your planned inspection activities to gather objective evidence on those themes.

Do not:

- investigate or follow up the specific circumstances of a complaint received before and/or during the inspection or come to any conclusions about the complaint itself
- use complaints, or information about complaints, as evidence to support grading, or reach any grades based on complaints; however, you may take account of wider issues and information raised by complaints when planning inspection activities and you can use the evidence that you find through those activities to support your decision-making about grades

## **Notification**

### **Constructive, professional dialogue**

At the heart of our inspections is a professional dialogue

between inspectors, leaders and [the nominee](#). This dialogue must follow our [code of conduct](#) and always be carried out with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect.

The notification call should set the tone for the inspection. From the outset, you should build positive relationships and rapport with leaders. Consider the well-being of both staff and leaders throughout.

## **Timing of the call**

Contact the school by telephone, usually after 12 noon on the designated day.

In the rare case that it appears the school is no longer operating, ask the duty desk or Senior His Majesty's Inspectors (SHMI) to check whether the DfE requires an inspection to be carried out to check this.

If so, we will normally carry out an emergency inspection in line with the [handbook for additional inspections of independent schools](#), instead of a standard inspection.

## **Speaking with senior leaders**

Ask to speak with the headteacher. If the headteacher is unavailable, ask to speak with the most senior member of school staff who is available.

## **Notifying leaders of the inspection**

Follow the script to notify the school of the inspection. This will

ensure that the information is accurately recorded.

Inform the school that an inspection is taking place and explain the type and length of the inspection.

Confirm details of the inspection team and check whether there are any conflicts of interest or concerns. Note any conflicts or concerns and your response in the evidence base.

## **Scheduling the planning call**

Agree with the headteacher, or the next most senior member of staff, the time for a second, longer call (the [planning call](#)).

Explain that this is normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this. Agree with the headteacher the arrangements for this.

Explain what you are going to discuss on the call, that it may take up to 90 minutes, and why it needs to happen reasonably early on the same day (although after you have completed some [preparation](#)).

Emphasise to leaders that they can take breaks as needed.

Agree who should attend that call. Encourage the headteacher to have at least one other senior leader present to assist and support them in all calls. The nominee is advised to attend all calls.

## **Nominee**

Explain the [role of the nominee](#). Ask leaders if they would like to select a nominee to work closely with inspectors throughout the inspection. If they do, ask if the proposed nominee has accessed any of our optional training for nominees – though

stress that it will not hinder the inspection if they have not. Reassure leaders that, if they decide they do not need a nominee, the inspection will still proceed as planned without any adverse impact.

Confirm that the nominee is suitably placed to support inspection activity. They should be a senior member of staff with a thorough knowledge of how the school operates on a day-to-day basis. Record in the evidence base the role of the person selected to be the nominee.

Ask that the nominee, if one has been selected, joins the planning call(s) alongside the headteacher and any other senior leaders. If the nominee joins the planning call(s) you must check that any information that you discuss is appropriate to share with them.

You must not share confidential notes or complaint-related information with the nominee. Only relevant logistical and contextual information may be shared.

## **Reasonable adjustments and adaptations**

Ask whether anyone who will be joining the planning call requires any reasonable adjustments due to a disability and, if so, what arrangements are already in place.

Consider any requests, following the guidance in the [Responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations](#) section, and contact the duty desk. Advise the headteacher of your decision. If they have any questions or unresolved concerns following this discussion, refer them to the provider contact helpline.

Consider making other adaptations to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may otherwise

be put at a disadvantage.

## Confirming key school information

Ask leaders to confirm the relevant school information, as listed in the [inspection information for non-association independent schools](#).

Advise leaders that they will receive formal notification of the inspection in a letter, which will be sent by an inspection support administrator as an email attachment. This will include information about the surveys to be completed by staff, pupils and parents and carers (who we will refer to as 'parents' throughout, for ease of reading) and a [list of documents](#) that the school will need to provide at the start of the inspection. We will also provide information about the portal and how leaders can upload documents.

Complete and upload the notification form and inform the inspection support team that you have made the notification call.

## Requests for deferral

Familiarise yourself with our guidance on [deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence](#).

You must contact the duty desk if you receive a request for a deferral.

## Planning call

Call the school at the time agreed in the notification call. This is

normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this. Ask the school not to record this call or any further calls. In exceptional circumstances, you may permit the school to record the call where this is required to respond to a request for reasonable adjustments. Similarly, tell school leaders we do not normally record the call, unless we have agreed this beforehand with them. Let leaders know that they are welcome to take notes.

Remember that the aim of this call is to have a meaningful and professional conversation about the school, its context, and leaders' views about its strengths and priorities for improvement. It is an important discussion that will help you to form a top-level view of the school.

Explain that the call will be in 3 parts:

- introduction and discussing practicalities
- understanding the school's context
- planning the timetable for the first half day

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

Record the roles of all school leaders who are on the call.

Remind leaders that:

- we have a [code of conduct](#) that sets out our expectations for leaders and staff at the school
- these expectations include asking the school to be open, transparent and honest with inspectors so that the inspection can be carried out with integrity

You should cover the following points.

## **Leaders' well-being**

Check on the headteacher's and any other leaders' well-being.

Establish who is responsible for the headteacher's well-being on a day-to-day basis. Record how to contact them.

Make sure leaders are aware that support for their own, and their staff's, well-being is available through the charity [Education Support](#).

## **Reasonable adjustments and adaptations**

Check that any reasonable adjustments agreed during the notification call have been put in place. Make sure you have considered any other requested adaptations appropriate to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may otherwise be put at a disadvantage.

Remind leaders that they can ask for any further reasonable adjustments or adaptations during the rest of the inspection process. See the [Responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations](#) section for further information.

Record any requests and their outcome in the evidence base, along with any other adaptations that have been requested.

## **Ensuring that leaders have what they need**

Establish whether leaders have the practical information they need, including links to surveys, the provider contact helpline number, and instructions on how to upload documents to the portal.

Make sure leaders are aware of their statutory duty to let parents know about the inspection. Encourage them to use the school's electronic systems (such as text messages) to do this, if these are available. Remind them that we have provided a letter they can send to parents to notify them formally of the inspection, either as an electronic copy, including a link to Ofsted's Parent View survey, or as a paper copy for pupils to take home.

Ask leaders if they have any requests that are specific to the

school's context. For example, in specialist settings, you may be asked to provide photographs of the inspection team to help prepare pupils for who they will see.

Make sure leaders understand the process of inspection and the toolkit that you will use to guide evaluation and grading – let them know where they can access the inspection documents.

Ask leaders if they have any issues or concerns that they would like to raise or if there is anything they want to clarify before the inspection. Explain that they will also be able to raise any emerging matters during the inspection itself.

If any complaints have been made about the school, explain that the inspection will focus on the wider issues raised by the complaints. Inspectors will not investigate individual complaints.

Establish whether you need your regional support team to book [an interpreter](#) to support some or all of the inspection or whether the school will provide one.

### **Additional information about the school**

You will also need to find out:

- where applicable, the school's religious ethos and/or whether it is designated by order as having a religious character (see [The school has a religious ethos and/or designated by order as having a religious character](#) for further steps to take)
- where applicable, any nursery provision (see [Provision for 2- and 3-year-olds](#) in the inspection information for schools)
- where applicable, any before- and/or after-school care or holiday clubs, particularly if these take 2- to 8-year-olds (if the school offers before and/or after-school care for its own pupils, you must consider that provision as part of the school inspection)
- if the school is part of a group of schools, the different levels of responsibility and oversight within the group, to ensure that you can have the appropriate discussions with the right

leaders

You may also want to follow up on any additional clarifications needed following your pre-inspection preparation.

## **Part 2: understanding the school's context and leaders' priorities for improvement**

It is crucial that, as part of the planning call, you develop an accurate understanding of the school's context, including the demographics of the pupils and their needs. This will help you to reflect on the impact of leaders' actions on its pupils, particularly on those accessing statutory support and those who face barriers to their learning and/or well-being.

Remember to apply the [3 key principles](#) throughout the planning call.

### **Contextual information, leaders' successes and leadership priorities**

To deepen your understanding of the school, and in collaboration with leaders, use this part of the call to discuss:

- the school's context, including any changes since the previous inspection and details of (and responses to) any recent tensions in, or pressures from, the community
- leaders' recent and ongoing priorities and challenges, the actions they have taken to maintain or improve standards, and how they have assessed the impact of their actions
- leaders' evaluation of the school's strengths and successes, and their priorities for improvement, including where they believe they currently sit in terms of the 5-point grading scale for each evaluation area
- any relevant safeguarding matters, as identified by leaders,

including any safeguarding concerns, or allegations made about adults

## **Leaders' approach to inclusion**

Explore:

- leaders' approach to ensuring that staff are able to identify disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those known (or previously known) to social care, and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being; you need to consider this even if leaders have not identified any pupils on roll who fall into these groups – this is to ensure that leaders are identifying and addressing pupils' needs effectively
- how the school supports these pupils
- the impact of the support given to pupils and if and how that impact is monitored and reviewed
- steps the school has taken to meet the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils
- the school's timetable, how the curriculum is organised, and how leaders work with external professionals to meet pupils' needs – this is particularly important when inspecting specialist independent school settings
- any current use of [part-time timetables](#)
- where applicable, any provision for pupils with SEND
- whether the school is currently making any use of [alternative provision \(AP\)](#)
- confirmation of the follow-up information about alternative education arrangements, as listed in the [inspection information for non-association independent schools](#)

If leaders have not identified any pupils on roll who are disadvantaged, have SEND, or are known (or were previously known) to children's social care, reflect on why this may be the case. Take into account any contextual information about the school.

## **Part 3: planning the timetable for the first and second days**

The purpose of this part of the call is to shape the plan for the first and second days of inspection. Make sure leaders understand the plan and know what practical arrangements they need to make to support it.

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

- celebrate what leaders have identified as strengths
- validate the priorities leaders have identified for improvement, and whether they have an effective plan to bring about the desired impact
- highlight where there is more to do to ensure that all pupils achieve, belong and thrive

Leaders may invite you to meet all available staff at the start of the on-site inspection. You should agree to this wherever possible to help develop positive relationships and a professional rapport with all staff involved in the inspection. This may happen at the start of day 2 when the full inspection team are on site.

An inspector must look at the single central record (SCR) as soon as possible at the start of the inspection. This is to assure leaders early on about the quality of their safer recruitment procedures, in case they need extra time to address any minor administrative omissions. Explain that you will be looking at the culture of safeguarding across the school throughout the inspection.

Throughout the inspection, you (as the lead inspector) are responsible for assuring the quality of the evidence gathered, managing the conduct of the inspection team, and ensuring the smooth running of the inspection with school leaders, including

the nominee (if there is one). You will focus on building and managing relationships with leaders, having the oversight on leadership, governance and safeguarding, and quality assuring the work of your team.

Check with leaders on their well-being and the well-being of other staff before inspection activities begin each day. For day 1, you (as the lead inspector) must schedule time to meet the designated safeguarding lead.

Find a suitable time to meet with the proprietor and (where applicable) those responsible for governance on either day 2 or day 3.

Briefly explain [case sampling](#) to leaders. Ask them to provide a list of pupils who:

- are disadvantaged
- have SEND
- are known, or were previously known, to children's social care
- face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being

Explain that you will use this list to select approximately 6 pupils for case sampling.

Make sure you select a representative sample, always including (where relevant):

- a child with an education, health and care plan, and, where possible, a disabled child
- a looked-after child
- a child known, or previously known, to social care
- a child from any other groups that leaders have identified as significant to the context in which they work

Tell leaders that you will agree on the pupils for case sampling at the beginning of day 2.

Discuss any practical arrangements to support inspection activities, for example how the school will give inspectors access to the information required by the ISS.

At the end of day 1, you will meet with the inspection team member(s) (where applicable), leaders and the nominee (if one has been appointed) to reflect on the evidence gathered so far. This includes compliance with the ISS checked so far.

## **Inspection activities on day 2**

Inspection activities on day 2 follow a clear structure organised into 2 parts. Explain the following structure to leaders on this planning call.

### **The first part**

The team will focus on gathering first-hand evidence of pupils' experiences through:

- learning walks with leaders
- discussions with pupils at the start of the day and social times
- considering, in detail, the experiences of pupils identified for case sampling

You will spend some time with the headteacher seeing the start of the school day, understanding leaders' priorities and sampling the team's inspection activities.

You will also plan in time for you to meet with the designated safeguarding lead, and for an inspector to meet with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and/or the leader for inclusion. You should aim to be present for at least some of this inclusion meeting.

Inspectors will accompany relevant leaders on learning walks, so that inspectors can connect the top-level view with the first-hand evidence they gather about pupils' experiences. These learning walks will allow leaders the opportunity to show inspectors their school, discuss the context in which they work and exemplify the impact of their actions. Explain that as part of learning walks,

inspectors will look at pupils' work and discuss their learning with them.

Ensure that time is set aside for inspectors to spend time with pupils during social times, such as break and lunch.

Next, around late morning/lunchtime, you will meet with the inspection team, leaders and the nominee (if one has been appointed) to reflect on the evidence gathered so far. This again includes evidence on whether the school complies with the ISS checked so far.

Tell leaders that, during this discussion, you will check the emerging evidence, referencing the toolkit evaluation areas with a focus on whether the 'expected standard' is being met and on compliance with the ISS.

You will also discuss with leaders how the emerging evidence aligns with their self-evaluation.

### **The second part**

Explain that inspection activities for the second part of day 2 usually begin with focused leadership meetings, then explore further what it is like 'on the ground' for pupils. Typical afternoon activities are:

- focused leadership meetings with those responsible for particular areas, scheduled in advance
- further lesson visits or other learning walk activities
- further informal or planned discussions with pupils
- meetings with staff
- further activities relating to case sampling, such as discussions with parents or carers, or with leaders of any AP that pupils attend

### **Focused leadership meetings and learning walks**

Focused leadership meetings and learning walks on days 1 and 2 might include, for instance, the leaders responsible for

curriculum and teaching, or the leaders responsible for behaviour.

When planning days 1 and 2, discuss with leaders which evaluation areas you are likely to want to explore in more detail through focused leadership meetings and learning walks. This will help them to plan and organise these meetings at a suitable time during the afternoon of day 2. Bear in mind that in smaller schools, one leader may be responsible for many different areas. Discuss with leaders who would be the most appropriate person for an inspector to talk with, and their availability.

It is important that time is scheduled to talk with these leaders, so that you can understand their rationale for the strengths and areas of focus they have identified, and their actions to date. Together, you and the leader may carry out further inspection activities, including learning walks, to see the impact on the ground. This will help to validate the leaders' self-evaluation. Explain to leaders that learning walks are an important opportunity for them to show you their school's context.

## **Other points to discuss with leaders on the call**

### **Nominee**

If leaders have chosen to have a nominee, agree with them how the nominee will support the inspection, including facilitating logistics, gathering contextual information, and coordinating inspection activities and access to evidence.

Explain to leaders that the nominee can accompany you (as the lead inspector) throughout each day of the inspection, except when their presence could limit evidence-gathering or discourage open communication. For example, the nominee should not attend confidential meetings with staff, pupils or parents. Be clear about this, and agree which activities it applies to.

## **Write-up time**

Make sure leaders understand that the inspection team will require short amounts of time between inspection activities to write up their evaluations.

## **Reflection meetings: an overview**

Inform leaders that there will be regular reflection meetings with leaders and the inspection team throughout the 3 days of the inspection. These will be:

- an end-of day reflection meeting at the end of day 1
- an ongoing reflection meeting around lunchtime on day 2
- an end-of-day reflection meeting at the end of day 2
- an ongoing reflection meeting at the start of day 3
- an ongoing reflection meeting around lunchtime on day 3
- a grading meeting at the end of day 3
- ongoing reflective conversations with leaders, through learning walks and other joint activity (where applicable)

Where meetings are held around lunchtime, these should be planned so that they do not prevent inspectors from speaking with pupils at social times.

## **Ongoing reflection meetings**

Inform leaders that there will be regular reflection meetings with leaders and the inspection team throughout the 3 days of the inspection. Explain that we can be flexible about who attends. Agree with leaders who will attend these meetings.

These meetings are an opportunity to review the evidence in relation to the toolkit evaluation areas covered so far. It is important leaders understand that sharing the team's thinking enables open, professional and transparent dialogue with them. You can also discuss whether any inspection activity needs to be adapted in light of emerging evidence.

The meetings also allow leaders to identify any evidence they

feel is pertinent in reaching a well-rounded understanding of how the school normally operates.

These reflection meetings will be rooted in an ongoing review of the toolkit evaluation areas covered in the inspection activities so far.

### **End-of-day reflection meetings: days 1, 2 and 3**

These meetings will include leaders, the nominee (if there is one) and the inspection team (where applicable). These meetings will review all toolkit evaluation areas. This includes compliance with the ISS.

Agree which leaders will attend the end-of-day reflection and grading meetings and the expectations for these. Explain that it is flexible who attends, as long as they agree with you who is attending before the meeting takes place.

Make sure on this call that leaders understand the purpose and content of the 3 end-of-day reflection meetings.

### **Days 1 and 2**

Review the evidence gathered by the inspection team so far. Use the grading standards in the toolkit to consider the emerging picture, starting with the 'expected standard' for each evaluation area. The toolkit focuses on the quality and impact of leaders' choices and actions on pupils, rather than compliance alone.

Also check compliance with the ISS.

By this point, you may have gathered reliable evidence indicating a 'secure fit' around an evaluation area. If this is the case, and leaders agree, you may decide not to gather any further evidence in this evaluation area. This is likely to be the case where the emerging evidence aligns with the leaders' self-evaluation against the grading standards.

Explain that in this meeting you will also work with leaders to finalise the plan for day 3 of the inspection. It is important that leaders are clear about meetings they might need to organise

for day 3.

### **Day 3**

This meeting is the formal grading meeting. This is when you evaluate the evidence gathered, including that already shared and discussed at the reflection meetings. Provisional, final grades will be determined based on a 'secure fit'. This includes whether the ISS are all met.

### **Final feedback meeting**

Ask the school to invite the appropriate people to the final feedback meeting at the end of day 3 (see the inspection information for schools for [who may attend](#)).

Agree a time when you will be able to upload the revised timetable to the portal.

End the call and upload the revised timetable to the portal by the agreed time.

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

Inform team members of any relevant information, especially the relevant context of the school. Record this information in the evidence base. Inform the team of the planned activities.

Make sure all team members are aware of the outcome of any requests for reasonable adjustments, and any other adaptations to the inspection process that are to be made where those with other protected characteristics may otherwise be put at a disadvantage.

If an Ofsted-booked interpreter will be supporting the visit, contact them now.

# Core requirements throughout the inspection

On each day of the inspection, arrive at the time arranged with leaders. This should not be before 12 noon on the first day, and 8am on subsequent days. The inspection team should leave by 5pm other than in exceptional circumstances.

Throughout the inspection, you (as the lead inspector) are responsible for assuring the quality of the evidence gathered, managing the conduct of the inspection team, and ensuring the smooth running of the inspection with school leaders, including the nominee (if there is one).

Check with leaders on their well-being and the well-being of other staff before inspection activities begin each day.

With the nominee (if there is one), review the planned timetable and adjust inspection activities, as needed, to accommodate the school's working day.

Remember to plan regular time to reflect on and record the evidence, and to share any emerging evaluation with leaders.

Limit the number of attendees at each reflection meeting (including the grading meeting) to allow for a productive conversation in the time available. Always invite headteachers, a senior representative of the group (where applicable) and the nominee. Additional members of staff may attend at your discretion.

At each reflection meeting, discuss with the headteacher and nominee the well-being of staff and how effective any reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations have been. Ask them whether they want to change the arrangements/adaptations or make any additional requests. (Refer to the [Responding to](#)

[requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations](#) section for further information.) Continue to anticipate and consider any further reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations you may need to put in place.

## Evaluating safeguarding in practice

When determining whether safeguarding is 'met', it is important to go beyond reviewing documents and ensuring that the school meets statutory requirements.

You must connect all the evidence gathered during the inspection to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding culture over time. This includes speaking with staff and pupils (where appropriate), reviewing policies and casework, and observing how the school models and maintains safe practice.

To evaluate safeguarding culture, you must:

- probe further than simply the information a school presents to you
- take account of a range of evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements over time
- through sampling, review decisions made by the school, any incidents that have occurred since the previous inspection, and whether the school has taken appropriate action to deal with safeguarding concerns and to safeguard the pupils affected; consider the effectiveness of the school's referral systems and its work with relevant professional agencies
- review, with the headteacher, any allegations or concerns about adults, and the steps the school has taken in response to them
- discuss with the proprietor and those responsible for governance how they manage processes in relation to

- safeguarding concerns or allegations about the headteacher
- consider proportionately the views of pupils, parents and staff, using surveys, complaints or local intelligence
  - look for evidence of effective safeguarding training and practice and the impact of this on pupils
  - examine how the school teaches pupils to keep themselves safe, and talk with them about whether they feel safe and know who to turn to if they have concerns
  - examine how effectively the school is implementing its safeguarding policies and processes, and how it keeps them under review

Throughout the inspection, adapt activities to the school's context and agree this with leaders where possible.

In all standard inspections, you as the lead inspector must:

- review the SCR early on day 1
- meet the designated safeguarding lead and review a sample of casework on day 1 (typically you should try to do this personally rather delegating to a member of the inspection team)

You or another inspector must also:

- meet the SENCo or equivalent
- meet the proprietor and the person(s) responsible for the school's day-to-day operation
- meet those responsible for governance, where relevant (for more information, see the [Engaging with the proprietor and those responsible for governance](#) section)
- if applicable, evaluate any resourced provision and/or SEN unit delegated to the school
- speak with a local authority representative involved in the commissioning and oversight of placements in the school, where these are commissioned by the local authority – for

example, in independent special schools

- speak with any teacher for is responsible for looked-after children
- evaluate the school's use of AP, part-time timetables and flexi-schooling (see the [Pupils not in full-time on-site education](#) section)
- meet members of staff and review the responses of staff to the online survey
- consider the views of parents, including their responses to the Parent View survey
- consider the views of commissioners, for example a local authority that funds placements for pupils at the school
- review the content and implementation of the policies and all other requirements of the ISS
- speak with the local authority designated officer if there are any wider concerns about how the school manages concerns or allegations made about staff

During inspections you may also speak with any virtual school head(s) who are responsible for current or previous looked-after children, those with a child in need or child protection plan, or those living under kinship care arrangements.

These activities will be spread across days 1, 2 and 3 of the inspection.

## **Gathering and recording evidence on the independent school standards**

By evaluating leadership and governance, you will also gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured the school meets all the ISS.

In standard inspections, check that the school complies with all

paragraphs of the ISS. Record 'met', 'not met' or 'not applicable' in the compliance record. Some paragraphs do not require a judgement since they are for information. You can use the internal 'Independent school standards dependencies checklist' to clarify these. Consider each paragraph of the ISS on its own. Record the evidence to support your evaluations in the evidence base.

Many of the ISS relate to specific evaluation areas and evidence is gathered through broad inspection activity. Where this is not the case, you will need to gather additional evidence: part 5 of the ISS relating to the premises and accommodation; part 3 relating to health and safety, fire safety and first aid; part 6 relating to provision of information; part 7 relating to the manner in which complaints are handled; and schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Consider these requirements through the evaluation of the leadership and governance evaluation area. Failure to meet any of the ISS means that the quality of leadership and governance does not meet the 'expected standard'.

In the rare case that you cannot gather reliable evidence to grade an evaluation area or judge whether requirements of the ISS are met, for example if there are [no pupils on roll](#), you should record 'insufficient evidence'.

## Recording evidence

You must make sure that the evidence base:

- is a clear and accurate evaluative record of relevant evidence (rather than a verbatim record of discussion or inspection activities)
- explains how you arrived at your decisions and findings, including how you weighed the evidence in reaching these – this includes findings relating to provisional grades and compliance with the ISS, as well as other relevant decisions,

such as the focus of inspection activities or responses to requests by leaders and the nominee (if there is one)

- complies with any relevant legal requirements, thresholds and Ofsted policies (justifying any departures from policies) and reflects our guidelines (including this operating guide for non-association independent schools and the toolkit)

If leaders have accompanied you on activities, briefly review your findings with them. Record and evaluate evidence in a proportionate way, with enough detail to clearly explain the gradings you made. Recorded evidence should be more detailed in cases where decisions are more complex, or potentially have greater consequences. This is so that you can record accurately and clearly how the gradings were reached and how you took account of relevant policies and guidance in doing so.

There will be times during the inspection when not using a laptop may be helpful – for example, in conversations with pupils or during a learning walk. Avoid making handwritten notes to upload to your laptop later where possible; instead block out time following inspection activities to add your reflections to the evidence base at the earliest opportunity.

## **Meeting standards and determining grades**

### **Independent school standards**

The ISS align closely with the descriptions of the ‘expected standard’ set out in the toolkit. If the school complies with all the requirements of the ISS relating to an evaluation area, this means it has reached the ‘expected standard’ in that area. A

school that does not meet the requirements of the ISS would be graded as ‘needs attention’ or ‘urgent improvement’, depending on how serious the failings are.

Aspects of the ISS that are not usually gathered through broad inspection activity are considered through the leadership and governance evaluation area, for example part 5 of the ISS for premises of and accommodation at schools. If the school has failed to meet any of the ISS, this will mean that the quality of leadership and governance does not meet the ‘expected standard’ grade.

## Evaluating against the toolkit evaluation areas and grading standards

When you agree provisional grades for each evaluation area, they should include a grade for the early years and/or post-16 provision, where this applies. In rare instances, for example if the provision has 5 children/students or fewer, you may decide not to report on it separately or give a grade. You should agree this with the national duty desk.

When you have collected reliable evidence in an evaluation area to support an indicative grade, as set out in the ‘gathering evidence about’ sections of the toolkit, consider whether all the ISS and expected standards are reached (a secure fit). If this is the case, consider whether all the strong standards have also been reached securely. At this point, you might have enough evidence to consider the ‘exceptional’ grade. This is summarised in the following table. You should call the duty desk when an ‘exceptional’ grade is likely.

When grading, consider the following steps.

Step	Question	Resulting grade
1. Expected	Does the school reach all	If no, go to the

<b>standard</b>	the expected grading standards and all the associated ISS for this evaluation area?	‘Where the evaluation standards are not reached’ section.  If yes, go to Step 2.
<b>2. Strong standard</b>	Does the school also reach all the strong grading standards?	If no, grade as ‘expected standard.’  If yes, go to Step 3.
<b>3. Exceptional</b>	Is there clear evidence of the standards that define exceptional practice?	If yes, grade as ‘exceptional’.  If no, grade as ‘strong standard’.

Some minor inconsistencies may lead to priorities for improvement but do not lower the grade. Where one or more standards have not been met for a particular grade, then that grade cannot be given and you should refer to the guidance below.

## Where the evaluation standards are not reached

### Needs attention

An evaluation area is likely to be graded as ‘needs attention’ when:

- the ‘expected standard’ grade has not been reached, and the associated ISS are ‘not met’, and

- no 'urgent improvement' indicators apply

Use the indicators for 'needs attention' to explain the grading and outline the next steps. These should be based on the expected standards that have not been evidenced during the inspection, and the associated prompts in the 'gathering evidence' section of the relevant evaluation area.

### **Urgent improvement**

If any of the 'urgent improvement' indicators apply, the evaluation area is likely to be graded 'urgent improvement'. You should call the duty desk when an 'urgent improvement' grade is likely.

Use the relevant expected standards to help craft the school's next steps, including the associated prompts in the 'gathering evidence' section of the relevant evaluation area.

## **If safeguarding is 'met'**

Safeguarding will be graded as 'met' overall if:

- the standard in paragraph 7 of the ISS is 'met'
- all the individual safeguarding standards are 'met' and none of the 'not met' standards apply

## **If safeguarding needs minor improvements**

During the inspection, you may identify minor improvements that the school needs to make to its safeguarding practices, such as correcting small administrative errors in paperwork or updating policies. If leaders can make these minor improvements easily before the end of the on-site inspection, give them every chance

to do so by discussing this constructively with them.

Sometimes, leaders cannot finish making the required minor improvements before the end of the on-site inspection. When this is the case, you can still complete the inspection and grade safeguarding as 'met' if they have taken the necessary steps to resolve the issues – for example, where training has been booked but will not take place for a number of weeks. In these circumstances, paragraph 7 of the ISS should also be judged as 'met'.

In these cases, the minor improvements should be such that, if they were not made straight away, leaving them undone would not have an immediate and/or significant impact on pupils' safety.

## **Suspending an inspection**

In some cases, more significant improvements are needed, and leaders cannot make them before the end of the on-site inspection, nor take necessary steps to resolve them in that time.

Where this is the case, but all other evaluations are at least at the expected standard, consider suspending the inspection. Inspections can be suspended if, based on the information you have at that time, you believe leaders are capable of resolving the safeguarding issues within 3 months, and there are no significant risks to children.

When assessing whether leaders are capable of resolving the issues within 3 months, consider whether the proprietor has agreed to assist the school in making the necessary improvements.

If you are considering suspending the inspection, call the duty desk, who will arrange a consultation with the DfE to discuss

whether it is appropriate.

If the DfE agrees, make sure that:

- all other parts of the inspection are complete and the evidence base is secure
- leaders, governors/trustees (where relevant) and the proprietor are clear on the proposed deadline by which they are expected to have made the necessary changes (this should be a maximum of 3 months but can be less than 3 months if the school would like us to return quicker and/or if Ofsted considers that there is a reason to do so)
- leaders, governors/trustees and (where relevant) the proprietor agree to assist the school in making the necessary improvements
- leaders understand that the letter they will receive about the suspension will also be copied to the Secretary of State for Education
- leaders agree to publish the letter they will receive about this on their school website (where there is one) and to send to parents

Do not conclude the inspection, but explain that inspectors will return to the school within 3 months, as set out in our [gathering additional evidence protocol](#), to complete the inspection.

If these assurances cannot be met and you decide not to suspend the inspection, conclude it as normal. Paragraph 7 of the ISS would be judged not to be met and leadership and governance graded as 'urgent improvement'. You must make your rationale for not suspending the inspection clear and record it in the evidence base.

## Where the evidence indicates a

# particular grade is likely to be reached

During a reflection meeting, if you have reliable evidence indicating a particular grade for any evaluation areas, let leaders know. If the evidence supports a provisional grading decision, discuss and agree this with leaders. Record the provisional grade and leaders' comments in the evidence base.

**Remember** – you need to be very clear with leaders that any indicative grading throughout the inspection is provisional. The final grading process will be carried out at the end of the inspection and will be subject to Ofsted's quality assurance and consistency checking process.

If any of the ISS are judged to be not met, this will lead to a grade of 'needs attention' or 'urgent improvement', depending on how serious the failings are, for the associated evaluation area.

## What to do on site during the inspection: day 1

### First half day of the inspection

When you arrive on site, you should:

- check the well-being of leaders and staff and find out whether any issues have arisen since the planning call

- if they are on site, confirm that the team inspectors understand the school's context and leaders' priorities and actions
- meet with the headteacher and nominee (if there is one) to confirm the inspection timetable
- check you have all the documents detailed in the [inspection information for non-association independent schools](#)
- check you have the list of pupils to select for case sampling as discussed in the planning call
- 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 other adaptations to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may otherwise be put at a disadvantage (refer to the [Responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations](#) section for further information)
- if there have been any requests, record them in the evidence base along with their outcome and any other adaptations that have been requested

Follow the timetable and organisation for day 1 discussed in the [planning phone call](#).

## Structure for day 1

Remember to apply the [3 key principles](#) throughout the inspection.

Typical inspection activities should include:

- a short initial discussion with the headteacher and nominee to reflect further on your understanding of the school's context and leaders' priorities and impact, and to confirm inspection

priorities and the frequency of the reflection meetings

- a focus on aspects of the ISS that would not usually be gathered through broad inspection activity, including:
  - checking part 4 of the ISS as a priority (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors), evaluating both culture and record-keeping
  - a meeting between you, as the lead inspector, and the designated safeguarding lead
  - walking the premises and reviewing documents to check the ISS in part 5
  - checking welfare, health and safety policies and information for part 3 of the ISS
  - reviewing the information the school is required to provide to parents, as set out in part 6 of the ISS
  - reviewing the school's approach to complaints for part 7 of the ISS
- by the end of day 1, agreeing pupils for case sampling with leaders

At the end of this first half day, reflect on the evidence gathered and discuss early findings with leaders.

Consider whether any of the ISS that you have checked during this time are met, or if you need to gather more evidence. Also evaluate how the evidence currently aligns with the independent school toolkit.

The evaluation from these findings will inform the inspection schedule and activities for day 2. Discuss and agree these with leaders. Record leaders' comments in the evidence base.

## **What to do on site during**

# inspection: day 2

Inspection activities include:

- learning walks
- a review of pupils' work
- speaking with pupils, focusing on their experiences and the extent to which leaders' actions are effective in supporting them to achieve, belong and thrive
- focused leadership meetings, case sampling and any other appropriate follow-up inspection activities discussed with leaders
- further activities relating to compliance with the ISS

You must focus on inclusion through the day. This should include a meeting with the SENCo or equivalent, which you (as the lead inspector) should attend for at least part of the time.

Additionally, in the afternoon, carry out focused leadership meetings, further learning walks, case sampling and/or any other appropriate follow-up inspection activities that you have agreed with leaders. Also meet briefly with a group of staff to discuss safeguarding and any other relevant matters.

**Be flexible and responsive** – if new issues emerge, discuss them with school leaders and adjust the inspection activities as necessary. Use the toolkit to adapt what you focus on as you go. Leaders will be aware of the need for this from the planning call.

## Inspection activities

### Learning walks

Learning walks should be carried out with leaders. Remember, this is an important opportunity for leaders to show you their context. Each learning walk has an agreed specific focus on one of the following areas:

A learning walk with a focus on inclusion helps you gather evidence about the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being. This kind of learning walk typically includes a leader, such as the SENCo or equivalent and/or the inclusion leader.

A learning walk with a focus on curriculum, teaching and achievement provides the opportunity to evaluate how well pupils are learning the intended curriculum.

A learning walk with a focus on leadership gives leaders the opportunity to demonstrate how their priorities and actions are being realised. The headteacher or a relevant leader will usually accompany you on this kind of learning walk. It should involve visits to a broad sample of lessons to discuss and understand the impact of leaders' work. This will provide important evidence for leadership and governance in particular, as well as other evaluation areas.

Despite their specific focus, learning walks are also an opportunity to gather a range of evidence across all toolkit evaluation areas, including behaviour, personal development and well-being. Also gather evidence on the school's compliance with the ISS.

In schools with early years and primary-age pupils, learning walks in early years and key stage 1 classes focus initially on how well the strong foundations are secured. These learning walks should usually include a senior leader or relevant leader, such as a leader with responsibility for reading.

In secondary age/specialist provision schools, the curriculum, teaching and achievement learning walks focus on these 3 aspects across an agreed group of subjects. Select these during the planning call, taking into account leaders' views and what they have told you about areas that are strong and those where there is more to do. These walks should usually include a senior leader or relevant subject leaders, who may accompany inspectors for specific parts of the learning walk that relate to an area which they lead.

During learning walks, or soon after as part of ongoing reflection meetings, share a summary of your evaluations so that leaders have the opportunity to reflect on whether the emerging picture of the school is typical and one that they recognise. Where leaders do not feel this is the case, explore with them what other inspection activities may be useful and practicable.

### **Case sampling**

The initial sample should include pupils who have specific needs or face particular barriers to learning. This may include disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND (especially those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan), those known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being.

During learning walks, visit pupils in class or group times, review their work and speak with them where possible. Carry out any additional activities that help you to understand these pupils' experiences, the support they receive and the progress they are making from their starting points. This may include speaking with members of staff who know the pupils well, considering any relevant documentation and the work that takes place with multi-agency partners.

Further pupils may be identified for case sampling during the course of the inspection.

Sometimes, leaders may not have identified any pupils on roll who are disadvantaged, have SEND, or are known (or were previously known) to children's social care. In these instances, consider how well staff are supported and trained to be able to accurately identify these pupils' needs and to help them, should there ever be any on roll in future.

### **Reviewing pupils' work**

Where possible, review pupils' work as part of learning walks and use this to support discussions with pupils about their learning.

Reviewing pupils' work provides further evidence about the curriculum pupils have been taught, how this has been taught, and the knowledge and skills they have developed. Pupils' work is an important part of how we inspect the curriculum and teaching and of our evaluation of pupils' knowledge and skills. However, it must always be considered in the light of wider evidence.

Make sure you review the work of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being.

Pupils' work takes different forms. In early years, work is less likely to be in books. To understand how well children are learning the knowledge they need, you will have to spend more time talking with staff and observing high-quality interactions between children and adults. The same may be true for some pupils who are working at an earlier stage of the curriculum than would be expected for their age; in these circumstances you should apply the same principle.

### **Ongoing reflection meetings**

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 leaders' and staff well-being, and allow leaders and/or the nominee (where relevant) to raise any issues or concerns, or to 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 to what extent the evidence supports a 'secure fit' in any of the evaluation areas, starting with the expected standard for each evaluation area in the toolkit, and including the ISS and whether they are likely to be met
- consider which areas are emerging as strengths, 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, give leaders and the nominee an opportunity to suggest further evidence, and help you to identify further areas to explore
- identify the most appropriate inspection activities to gather further evidence required
- alert leaders if the evidence suggests that any area may likely be graded as 'urgent improvement' or if safeguarding may likely be 'not met'

It may sometimes be necessary to change the planned afternoon activities to make sure that they enable you to form a clear picture across the toolkit evaluation areas by the summary reflection meeting at the end of day 2. You should have explained the flexible, responsive nature of the inspection process to leaders in the planning call; keep them informed in a timely way of any changes that are required.

## **End of day 2: reflection meeting with leaders and the nominee**

At the end of day 2:

- check on the well-being of leaders and staff, and the process and conduct of the inspection; resolve any issues
- share headline evidence from day 2, and link it to the ISS
- record leaders' comments in the evidence base
- identify and agree the inspection activities required for day 3, including judging compliance with the ISS, and make appropriate plans
- discuss the practical arrangements for all the agreed inspection activities

Use the toolkit to:

- consider how the emerging evidence relates to the grading standards for a particular evaluation area
- consider whether the evidence reliably supports an indicative grade for a particular evaluation area, and whether the ISS are likely to be met
- consider the most appropriate focus for later inspection activities, using the evidence-gathering prompts

If, during the first days of the inspection, you think it is possible that there are serious weaknesses in the school's arrangements to meet the ISS consistently, or safeguarding is likely to be graded as 'not met', you must make leaders aware of this and call the national duty desk. During the call, you must talk through the evidence and discuss what you used in reaching the emerging findings. Where there are urgent concerns, for example if children may be at risk of harm, complete an [early notification form](#).

Let leaders and the nominee (if there is one) know if you have any emerging evidence that any evaluation area is likely to be graded as 'needs attention' or 'urgent improvement', or if safeguarding is likely to be graded as 'not met'. As noted, in these cases, the school will also not be meeting one or more of

the associated ISS.

Also let them know if the inspection might be suspended in line with the criteria set out in [Suspending an inspection](#). If the decision is to suspend the inspection, consider it to be incomplete.

## What to do on site during inspection: day 3

### Typical inspection activities

Begin day 3 with a reflection meeting with leaders and the nominee (where relevant). Confirm everyone's well-being, record any overnight developments or unexpected events, and agree whether the timetable needs fine-tuning. Adjust plans only as much as necessary.

Continue to carry out the agreed inspection activities. Allow the leaders to share additional evidence. Use the reflection meetings to reflect on the emerging evidence.

Like day 2, at the reflection meetings, consider whether you have enough evidence to indicate a provisional grade for any evaluation areas and whether any of the ISS that you have checked are met. Follow the guidance in the [Where the evidence indicates a particular grade is likely to be reached](#) section.

Continue to adapt inspection activity accordingly, explaining to leaders as an ongoing process during the inspection.

## **Serious weaknesses in meeting the independent school standards consistently or safeguarding is ‘not met’**

If, on day 3, you have provisionally graded one or more evaluation areas as ‘urgent improvement’ and the associated ISS as ‘not met’, or you think safeguarding is ‘not met’, you must call the duty desk again before the final feedback meeting. Where there are urgent concerns, for example if children may be at risk of harm, complete an [early notification form](#).

### **Grading meeting**

Once you have finished collecting evidence, the inspection team will hold the grading meeting. Leaders and the nominee (where relevant) should be invited to attend this meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting:

- check on leaders’ and staff well-being, and allow leaders and/or the nominee to raise any issues or concerns, or to seek clarification, including about the conduct of the inspection or of individual inspectors
- reflect with leaders and the nominee on how effective any reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations were; ask them whether they want to change the existing arrangements or make any additional requests for the final feedback meeting

Following this, for each evaluation area:

- consider the additional evidence gathered on day 3
- evaluate how this evidence builds on that gathered earlier in the inspection
- evaluate all evidence over the 3 days related to the ISS
- be clear about whether the school meets all the ISS or not

- agree as a team the provisional grades, following the grading process set out in the section [Meeting standards and determining grades](#), in the following order (as lead inspector, you are responsible for detailed oversight of leadership, governance and safeguarding):
- safeguarding
- inclusion
- curriculum and teaching
- achievement
- behaviour and attendance
- personal development and well-being
- early years/post-16 provision (as appropriate)
- leadership and governance
- where required, identify priorities for improvement

## Final feedback meeting

Record 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 should cover the points that will appear in the written report card.

Thank everyone for their contributions, engagement and involvement in the inspection. Then explain clearly to all those attending:

- that attendance at the final feedback meeting is voluntary and any attendee may leave at any time
- the key findings from the inspection, the provisional grades for each evaluation area, and the judgements on compliance with the ISS – explain that any of these may change as a result of

quality assurance and consistency checking procedures or moderation

- the rationale for each provisional grade and the key evidence supporting it, using the language of the toolkit
- celebrate the key strengths and validate the successes/evaluation of the school's work
- highlight any priorities for improvement (including safeguarding, if relevant) and what the school needs to do to improve, giving sufficient detail so that those attending understand their part in improving the school, especially the proprietor and those responsible for governance.
- that the DfE will decide any action to take in respect of any [ISS that are not met](#), which may include commissioning us to carry out a progress monitoring inspection
- that leaders should share the inspection findings with the proprietor and those responsible for governance, 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 report card they receive must not be published; they must wait for the copy of the final 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 upon in the report card
- that the headteacher or proprietor should, ideally, complete the post-inspection survey
- that if we have decided to suspend the inspection, we will consider it to be incomplete and that we will not place the school in a category of concern at this point
- that the school has an opportunity to [raise any issues or concerns](#) or to seek clarification about the inspection, and can

also contact us after the end of the inspection if necessary

- that leaders can make a formal complaint and that information on how to do this is available in our [complaints procedure](#)

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

## What to do after the inspection

After the end of the inspection, write the report card, following our internal writing guidance. Complete the compliance record. If there are concerns about the school, complete an [early notification form](#).

The text in the report card must:

- reflect the evidence gathered
- be clear, concise and focused on what matters most, as informed by the school's context, leaders' evaluation of their school and the toolkit
- explain the grade given for each evaluation area
- make clear what the school should improve
- be consistent with the compliance record and verbal feedback given to the school at the end of the inspection
- clearly evidence compliance with the ISS throughout, in particular non-compliance, so that it supports the DfE in taking any regulatory or enforcement action

If the DfE asked us to consider a complaint as part of the inspection, confirm to the DfE that you have done so in the compliance record.

If an additional inspection has taken place at the same time as the standard inspection, include the outcomes in the report card and compliance record for the standard inspection.

If the school submits comments after reviewing the report card, you are responsible, as the lead inspector, for reviewing and responding to the comments and making any necessary amendments to the report card and compliance record.

## **Reporting concerns to the DfE: completing the early notification form**

The purpose of the form is to provide initial advice to the DfE. You should normally send the form to the DfE on the working day after the on-site inspection ends.

If concerns are urgent, send the form to the DfE during the on-site inspection. [\[footnote 5\]](#)

You must complete an [early notification form](#) if you judge that:

- safeguarding is ‘not met’
- there are serious weaknesses in the school’s arrangements to consistently meet the ISS, which may have a serious impact on pupils’ welfare, health and safety, or academic or personal development
- the school is operating beyond its registration agreement, which constitutes a [material change to its registration](#)

If you have any concerns about the suitability of the proprietor or any other member of staff who is employed in a management capacity, report them to the DfE (as the appropriate authority) in the compliance record. This information is particularly relevant when it may have a bearing on a person’s suitability to participate in managing an independent school. This includes cases where the person’s conduct undermines British values or children’s

safety, or where you conclude that the person's conduct is so inappropriate that it may make them unsuitable to take part in managing an independent school.

## Quality assurance and consistency checking

You are responsible for the quality of your own work and that of your team, where applicable. You must ensure that the inspection is carried out in accordance with the [renewed education inspection framework](#) and the [code of conduct](#).

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

## Additional guidance to support inspection

As explained earlier, you must check whether anyone involved in the inspection requires (and/or has requested) any reasonable adjustments because of a disability. It is also important to continue to consider making other adaptations where those with other protected characteristics may otherwise be put at a disadvantage. Refer to the [Responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations](#) section for further information. Record any requests and their outcome in the evidence base, along with any other adaptations that have been requested.

# Additional guidance to support evidence-gathering

[The toolkit](#) provides guidance on gathering evidence within each evaluation area through inspection activities, as well as the standards you will use to determine grades.



The toolkit is not a checklist.

Connect evidence across a range of activities, determined by you (as the lead inspector), to gather reliable evidence and determine the grades.

Use the toolkit to guide conversations, consider evidence and ensure that grades reflect the evidence gathered during the inspection. Always discuss with leaders the typicality of the evidence you are gathering and the emerging evaluations. Where leaders do not believe the evidence is typical or reflective of their provision, try to gather additional evidence where appropriate within the time you have. This may be through visiting more lessons, speaking with other leaders, staff or pupils, or reviewing more of the school's work.

## Engaging with pupils

Use a range of activities to understand pupils' typical experiences, including through:

- analysing pupils' anonymous responses to the questionnaire and identifying any themes
- engaging with pupils and observing them at social times, and at the start and end of the day

- conversations with them during learning walks
- planned discussions with individuals or groups, including, where relevant, single-sex groups, taking account of individual pupils' communication needs
- listening to pupils read

Remind leaders that they must provide opportunities for inspectors to speak with pupils with no other adults present. In exceptional circumstances, pupils may ask for an adult to be present or may require this as a reasonable adjustment (for example, because of a specific communication need).

When speaking with pupils (whether individually or in groups), follow these principles:

- Make sure you have let school leaders know that you will speak with pupils as part of the inspection.
- Work closely with leaders on how best to talk with pupils who have learning needs, particularly in specialist settings. You may need to use assistive technology to communicate with pupils who are non-verbal. Some pupils may need another pupil or a member of staff to be their advocate, or a supporting adult may need to be present to provide reassurance and/or support with communication.
- In the early years, you might play alongside children or join them in an activity that encourages them to talk with you informally.
- When asking pupils questions about safeguarding, do this without another adult present. Having an adult present, especially someone whom pupils regard as connected to the school, such as a senior leader or governor, can affect their willingness to share their concerns and/or could cause difficulties with confidentiality.
- If any other pupil (or pupils) would like to speak with you or another member of the inspection team, make sure they have an opportunity to do so, even if the school or parents have refused to allow this without an adult present. In these

circumstances, the conversation should be with you and at least one other inspector. You should speak to the duty desk as soon as possible, and if practical before speaking with the pupil(s). Record details of the conversation and the circumstances surrounding it in the evidence base.

- Neither the school nor inspectors can compel a pupil to give their views to inspectors if they or their parents refuse permission.
- Try to speak with some single-sex pupil groups to give them the opportunity to speak more freely about issues such as sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence. This is particularly important in the secondary phase, and especially where there are reasons to think there have been incidents of sexual violence or abuse.
- Approach all conversations with pupils appropriately, considering their age and their needs. Do not ask them questions about a particular topic if leaders have asked you not to and you have agreed that it is reasonable to consider the topic sensitive for their pupils. However, in secondary schools or in the secondary phase, pupils must be taught awareness of and respect for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, as part of the expectations of the [DfE's statutory guidance on relationships and sex education and health education](#). If leaders of a school with secondary-age pupils do not allow you to speak with pupils about these topics, you may not be able to gather evidence that the school is meeting its obligations under the guidance and the associated ISS.
- If a primary school does not teach pupils about LGBT people, you must not ask them questions about this, unless the pupils themselves raise it. However, you can ask them questions to determine their understanding of positive and healthy relationships, friendships and family relationships, and about how the school encourages respect for all people, in line with the [DfE's guidance on relationships and sex education and health education](#).

- If pupils have completed an online survey, identify any emerging themes, taking account of those pupils' ages. In the primary phase, particularly in the early years and key stage 1, give priority to having conversations with pupils. Be proportionate in considering their views. Connect any evidence to the wider evidence base.

**If school leaders prevent inspectors from talking with pupils:**

- try to find out the reasons for this
- call the duty desk

Explain that, if you are entirely prevented from speaking with pupils, you may not be able to gather the necessary robust evidence about many aspects of provision, including positive evidence from pupils about what the school is doing well, which would enable it to evidence its strengths. It is also likely that safeguarding and paragraph 7 of the ISS would be graded as 'not met', as you would unlikely be able to gather the reliable evidence needed about the school's safeguarding culture to provide an indicative grade.

Without including information that might identify any pupils, record in your evidence base and report card if, during an inspection:

- it was not possible to speak with pupils
- inspectors were requested not to ask pupils certain questions
- an adult was present when inspectors spoke with pupils (including when this was due to a specific communication need)

Record the impact of any of these on the evidence and the inspection outcome.

## **Engaging with the proprietor and those**

## responsible for governance

Meet the proprietor and those responsible for governance (as relevant). [\[footnote 6\]](#) Consider the school's specific context when deciding who to speak with. If necessary, the meetings may be held by video conference call or telephone. In these discussions, you should focus on the broad, strategic oversight of the proprietor and those responsible for governance and not the day-to-day operational detail of the school.

Where a school is part of a group of schools, evaluate how this affects the individual school. Meet the leaders of the group, for example the chief executive or the education directors.

## Engaging with staff and leaders

Analyse the anonymous responses from the staff questionnaires and identify any themes that emerge.

Arrange to meet with the staff who are best placed to discuss the emerging themes. Discuss:

- their experience of working at the school
- how they ensure the best possible outcomes for pupils
- the impact of leaders' actions
- the culture of safeguarding

Remind staff that you do not expect them to bring documents with them, but they may do so if they wish.

If you are meeting individual members of staff and/or leaders, give them the opportunity to be accompanied by a colleague. However, it is important that staff can express their views freely to inspectors.

Adjust arrangements when necessary. For example, staff may

need a break, or a later opportunity to follow up the discussion, so that they can carry out their usual routines and responsibilities.

Be proportionate in considering the views of staff. Connect evidence from their views to the wider evidence base.

You should take careful account of the well-being of leaders and staff. If you see or suspect that a leader or staff member is upset or distressed at any point, you should respond sensitively. Where appropriate, consider suitable adjustments to enable the leader or staff member to continue. If you have serious concerns, you must inform those responsible for the person's well-being, other than in exceptional circumstances, and you must contact the national duty desk.

In exceptional circumstances, you may need to consider [pausing the inspection](#).

In early years provision, you need to agree with leaders when it would be best to talk with staff so that the correct adult-to-child ratios can be maintained.

## **Engaging with early career teachers (where relevant)**

When reviewing the list of current staff, you must check whether it includes early career teachers (ECTs) and/or any trainees on placement. This includes those on graduate employment-based routes, and undergraduate or postgraduate teaching apprenticeships.

If the school has ECTs, arrange a meeting with them to gather their views on how the school is supporting their development. This includes their views on the quality of mentoring and how the school makes sure they have access to training under the early career framework.

Offer ECTs the opportunity to be accompanied by a suitable colleague when they meet you. However, it is important that they are able to express their views freely. You may also wish to visit ECTs' lessons and meet with mentors and/or the induction tutor. [\[footnote 7\]](#)

You can meet any trainees the school employs on the graduate employment-based route or on the undergraduate or postgraduate teaching apprenticeships routes to evaluate their support, mentoring and induction. You may only visit lessons taught by trainees in schools with a high proportion of trainees compared to the total number of teaching staff, and if it is not otherwise possible to visit a representative sample of lessons. In these cases, you must be proportionate in taking trainees' performance into account when evaluating leadership and governance and curriculum and teaching.

## **Engaging with parents**

You must consider the views of parents on a standard inspection. Ofsted's Parent View survey remains open until midday on the final day of the inspection. Make sure you review the evidence from it throughout the inspection to take account of all responses.

If the response rate to Parent View is low, where possible look for further evidence of parents' views, for example through informal discussions at the start and end of the day. In the primary phase, this may include being outside when parents drop off and collect their children.

Discussions with parents should take place without leaders or staff being present, other than in exceptional circumstances.

If parents raise serious concerns, follow these up with school leaders and record their response. If the complainant has requested confidentiality, take all practicable steps to ensure

that their identity is not disclosed to the school.

Be proportionate in considering parents' views. Connect evidence from their views to the wider evidence base.

## **Liaising with the local authority**

If pupils have been placed in the school by a local authority, arrange to speak with a representative from one or more of the local authorities. This may help you to gather evidence about leadership and governance, inclusion, the use of AP and the school's safeguarding culture.

## **Reviewing key records**

Key records you review should include safeguarding records, attendance data, behaviour logs, complaints records and any other information that you need for evidence of the effective implementation of policies, as required by the ISS. They may also include training records.

Avoid auditing paperwork. Instead, evaluate what leaders understand from their own analysis and the actions they have taken as a result.

## **Specific contexts to consider**

**The school has a religious ethos and/or is designated by order as having a**

## religious character

In the first conversation with school leaders, you must determine whether the school has a religious ethos and/or has been designated by order as having a religious character. You should include this in the report card. If you are unsure, these details are recorded on the DfE's [Get Information about Schools \(GIAS\)](#) service. Further information is in part G of [Registration of independent schools: guidance for proprietors](#) (non-statutory guidance).

## The school has students aged 19 and over

An independent school may have students aged 19 and over. Inspectors should inspect and take account of provision for these students only if they began their studies before the age of 18 and remain on a continuing course of education. Pay particular attention to whether, in its approach to safeguarding, the school has taken account of the presence of adults studying alongside pupils of compulsory school age (or younger).[\[footnote 8\]](#)

## The school is an alternative provision registered as an independent school, or a school that offers alternative provision

Pupils in AP that is registered as an independent school often have significant, complex vulnerabilities. As with other schools, you should evaluate how leaders have made appropriate and effective safeguarding arrangements for pupils in the light of their higher vulnerability to safeguarding risks.

Use the evaluation areas in the usual way to gather evidence.

Take the context of the school into account. This includes how the school uses entry and exit criteria, how pupils, their parents and other professionals are involved in decisions about the support pupils receive, and the extent to which it is used in their best interests and is improving outcomes.

If other schools place pupils in the AP, consider the arrangements for accountability and responsibility for their oversight and safeguarding, including the safety of pupils from other schools travelling to and from this provision.

If there are no pupils on roll, contact the duty desk for advice.

## **The school is registered as a children's home**

In a school that is also registered as a children's home, we may inspect education in a standalone inspection or at the same time as the full inspection of the children's home.

Where possible, both inspections should be carried out at the same time so that inspectors can work together. This is the case for children's homes that are registered as independent schools and for residential special schools that offer residential provision for more than 295 days a year and therefore must be registered as a children's home.

If you are inspecting education at the same time as the full inspection of the children's home, you must work closely with the lead social care regulatory inspector to plan the inspection activities. You may meet with key staff together, such as the designated safeguarding lead(s), the proprietor and those responsible for governance. You must discuss your findings throughout the inspections and share inspection evidence where appropriate. This includes assessing pupils' attendance, and considering the strengths of the links between the day school and the children's home provision, and whether concerns are

raised with inspectors about the children's welfare during inspection.

In a standalone inspection of education in a school that is also registered as a children's home, you must read the most recent education and children's home reports on the preparation day. You must contact the lead social care regulatory inspector or their manager to find out about any current issues concerning children's welfare that may affect aspects of the school inspection.

## **The school has no pupils on roll**

In the rare case that a school has no pupils on roll at the time of the inspection, it is unlikely that you will be able to gather sufficient evidence to determine all the evaluation grades or to judge the school's compliance with all the ISS.

Gather as much evidence as possible. Do not base any grades on evidence relating to past pupils or on a prediction of what might happen if the school were to admit pupils.

You will not be able to evaluate whether safeguarding is 'met' or whether the school meets the safeguarding requirements in paragraph 7 of the ISS. You will also not be able to judge whether the school is complying with the ISS that require the effective implementation of policies on:

- the curriculum (paragraph 2(1)(a))
- behaviour (paragraph 9(b))
- bullying (paragraph 10)
- health and safety (paragraph 11)
- first aid (paragraph 13)
- risk assessment (paragraph 16(a))
- complaints (paragraph 33)

It may also not be possible to check compliance with the requirements of the ISS relating to:

- curriculum policy, plans and schemes of work (paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(b)(i) to 2(1)(b)(ii), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(h), 2(2)(i))
- relationships and sex education (paragraph 2A(1) to 2A(2)), for example the requirement to consult parents on the policy
- teaching 3(a) to (j)
- spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (any of the paragraphs in part 2)
- the other welfare, health and safety requirements in part 3

If you cannot gather enough evidence, explain this in the report card. Record 'insufficient evidence' against the relevant evaluation areas in the evidence base and also against the relevant ISS in the compliance record.

In the part of the report card 'What it's like to be a pupil at this school', report if there is no evidence of pupils having attended in the last 3 years or if the school has no plans to admit pupils in the next 12 months. This is so that the DfE can consider whether it has reasonable cause to believe that the school has ceased to be an independent educational institution and there is no reasonable cause to believe the institution will become an independent educational institution again within the following 12 months.

## **Carrying out an additional inspection as part of a standard inspection**

If you are carrying out a material change, progress monitoring or emergency inspection as part of a standard inspection, follow

the guidance in our [handbook for additional inspections](#). You should usually report these additional matters to the DfE in the standard inspection's report card and compliance record. There may be occasions, however, when the DfE asks for separate report cards.

## **Concurrent inspections of schools with the same proprietor**

When 2 or more schools with the same proprietor are inspected at the same time, the inspection teams may share evidence where it is appropriate. You can share:

- key lines of enquiry that emerge during planning, when the issues are likely to affect both/all of the schools
- findings during the inspection

You must not rely solely on shared evidence to make gradings, or judgements about compliance with the ISS, but must follow it up with your own evidence.

## **Working with interpreters on inspection**

An interpreter may support the inspection if:

- the school uses specialised language and communications systems, such as British Sign Language (in which case, the school may be able to provide an interpreter)
- the school teaches some or all of the curriculum in a language

other than English

We expect the school to provide all policies, schemes of work and plans and all other documents required by the ISS in English.

## **What to do before you arrive on site**

In part 1 of the planning call with the school, clarify that the interpreter will help inspectors to understand materials, teaching or discussions but will not contribute to inspection grades or judgements about whether the school meets the ISS.

In part 3 of the planning call, decide which activities the interpreter will likely support. You may need to allow extra time to carry out some activities with the interpreter, like discussions with pupils and parents, and lesson visits.

After part 3 of the planning call, call the interpreter (unless you will be working with the school's interpreter). Check that the interpreter has:

- watched our 'Training for interpreters' webinar
- completed our online safeguarding training
- familiarised themselves with our [code of conduct](#)

Inform them:

- of the name and address of the school – if the inspection is unannounced, give the interpreter the postcode of a nearby public setting, such as a supermarket or train station, and clarify that you will confirm the name and address of the school after you have gained entry to start the inspection
- that they must not disclose any information about the inspection or the school to anyone; they must keep the grades and findings from the inspection confidential until the report

card is published on Ofsted's reports website – all inspection activities and evidence remain confidential even after the report card has been published

- of the time that the interpreter must arrive at the school, and that they must not be on site before you
- that they must wear photographic identification at all times during the inspection
- about inspection practicalities, such as whether you need them to stay for the entire duration of the inspection, and the types of inspection activities you are likely to need them to support
- other practicalities, such as whether the school operates on multiple sites, if parking and/or lunch is provided by the school
- that they must familiarise themselves with Ofsted's internal guidance for interpreters, which you will email to them after the call [\[footnote 9\]](#)

Do not share the inspection plan or any pre-inspection materials with the interpreter.

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

You may ask the interpreter to interpret any conversations during any inspection activity. The interpreter may also be able to help you understand written documents, including pupils' work, but they cannot provide official translations of written text. [\[footnote 10\]](#)

Before the interpreter provides support for an activity, clarify what you need them to observe and interpret.

Examples of inspection activities an interpreter can support you with include:

- talking with pupils and parents
- reviewing policies, curriculum plans and schemes of work,

including records of discussions about the implementation and effectiveness of policies

- lesson visits, for example:
  - the questions that staff ask pupils, and pupils' answers
  - verbal exchanges between pupils
- reviewing the content of reference books, textbooks, displays, audio and visual footage and what is on the board in the classroom
- considering whether pupils' workbooks reflect the school's schemes of work; for example, you may ask the interpreter to describe content in pupils' work that derives from tasks set in textbooks
- considering whether classroom texts and resources reflect the school's schemes of work – you may ask to take samples into the team room to review with the interpreter, to avoid interrupting lessons
- reviewing registers
- reviewing communications between the school and parents, such as letters and newsletters
- reviewing boards, posters, screens and displays around the school
- reviewing library books
- reviewing the school's website

If, during any meetings or discussions, an individual reveals personal information or shares sensitive information and you do not need the interpreter's support, it may be appropriate to ask the interpreter to leave the room.

You, or a team inspector, must accompany the interpreter at all times.

Note that there are risks associated with interpreting language, including the risk of a slant or bias (conscious or unconscious), misinterpreting, or where there is not a direct translation. Ask for

clarity if you are not sure about the meaning of any interpretation.

Ask factual questions to assess what the interpreter observes, to avoid seeking the interpreter's opinion. For example, 'Tell me what it says here', 'What did the teacher just say?', 'What is the content of that wall display?'.

You or a team inspector must record in the evidence base when an interpreter has joined any inspection activity (including team meetings).

If the interpreter reads or hears something that is a cause for concern, for example a disclosure by a pupil or an example of inappropriate material, you must record this in the evidence base.

Ask the interpreter to review all relevant evidence in case anything has been missed or misinterpreted.

You must ensure that all notes made by the interpreter are in line with the internal guidance for interpreters and that they are included in the evidence base. Scan and upload the notes onto the system. Shred the hard copies no later than 5 working days after the last on-site day of the inspection. Do this off site (that is, not on the school grounds).

## **Pupils not in full-time on-site education**

### **Off-site alternative provision**

Review the commissioning arrangements for a selection of pupils who attend AP that is not part of the school's registration. This includes part-time provision for 14- to 16-year-old pupils in

a college or further education provider. You should explore the nature of the intervention, its objectives, the timeline to achieve these objectives and the plans for reintegrating pupils.

Establish the registration status of all pupils attending AP. They should ordinarily be dual-registered, with the main registration at the school and subsidiary registration at the AP.

Also consider the AP in other inspection activities, for example in meetings with the designated safeguarding lead, the leaders for attendance and behaviour, the SENCo or equivalent, and the proprietor/those responsible for governance. You should also aim to speak with a representative sample of leaders at the AP to assure yourself that the pupils attend regularly and that the placement meets their needs.

If possible, meet a sample of the pupils. Discuss their views on:

- the placement's suitability and effectiveness
- their transition plans
- contact with their home school during the placement

Record any concerns. Follow our safeguarding guidance and pass any concerns to the national duty desk.

As you cannot visit AP in person when inspecting independent schools, you must assure yourself in other ways that it is suitable, for example by calling the local authority, speaking with professionals remotely, including those who work at the AP, or talking with parents.

Seek to understand the impact of the AP on pupils' outcomes.

When considering placement decisions, evaluate:

- the reasons why leaders considered off-site provision (either temporarily or permanent) to be in each pupil's best interests (remember that if a pupil has been moved into AP when this was not in their best interests, this could be considered off-

rolling – see the [Evidence of off-rolling](#) section)

- leaders' arrangements for commissioning the placement and reviewing its impact
- the extent to which pupils, their parents, and the local authority and other education, health and care professionals (where appropriate) have been included in decisions about placements and planning
- the suitability of the placement, including how it addresses gaps in learning and supports pupils where improvements in behaviour are required
- whether any pupils are attending multiple providers, and how much they attend their home school – explore the rationale for this, whether decisions are in pupils' best interests and how leaders ensure that pupils are kept safe

**When considering quality and consistency assurance, evaluate:**

- the quality of the due diligence checks leaders carried out before the placement, and continue to perform, to ensure that the AP is safe, offers high-quality education and meets pupils' academic, vocational, pastoral and (if appropriate) SEND needs [\[footnote 11\]](#)
- safeguarding arrangements for pupils when they are travelling between the school and other providers

**When considering placement monitoring, evaluate:**

- evidence of regular contact with the AP, review dates (at least half-termly) and any necessary follow-up action to make sure the placement is successful
- leaders' awareness of where pupils are during school hours, including records of the address of the commissioned AP and any subcontracted provision or satellite sites the pupils may attend
- pupils' progress against the objectives set out in the intervention plans
- the attendance and behaviour of the pupils who attend the AP

- induction, transition and destination planning – plans for assessing when the pupils are ready to reintegrate into their home school or transition to specialist or post-16 provision

### **If the school uses unregistered alternative provision**

If you have any reason to believe that a school is using AP that may be operating as an unregistered independent school, call the duty desk.

Assure yourself that the decision to use unregistered AP has been made in the best interests of pupils and that the AP is safe and suitable.

## **Evidence of off-rolling**

During the inspection, you must be alert to any evidence that decisions the school has made amount to off-rolling. However, you should note that the DfE's guidance on exclusions does not apply to independent schools.

Off-rolling could include:

- putting pressure on a parent to remove a pupil from the school
- moving a pupil to off-site AP when that is not in their best interests, even with parental agreement
- encouraging a post-16 student not to continue with their course of study when this is against the best interests of that pupil
- sending a pupil home for a reason other than disruptive behaviour
- placing a pupil on a part-time timetable for behaviour reasons, contrary to the school's contract with parents
- intentionally removing a pupil from the school roll without correctly following regulations

When you find evidence of off-rolling, refer to it in the evidence base and report card. Be clear about its impact on the pupils involved, and on the school.

If you determine that the school has been using off-rolling, you should normally grade leadership and governance as 'urgent improvement'. You would also judge the school not to be meeting paragraph 34(1)(c) of the ISS.

You must also challenge leaders about any unusual patterns in the way attendance is recorded, including inaccurate register codes or changes to when the register is taken. For example, if you reasonably believe that a school is recording attendance inaccurately, has changed the timing of session registration to game attendance rates or is using part-time timetables inappropriately (see next section), you are likely to grade leadership and governance as 'urgent improvement'. You would also judge the school not to be meeting paragraph 15 of the ISS.

## **Part-time timetables**

If the school uses part-time timetables, check that it is doing so in line with the [DfE's attendance guidance](#) and [guidance on mental health and attendance](#).

Ask leaders why a pupil has a part-time timetable and check that there have been plans from the beginning for the pupil to return to a full-time timetable. In each case, evaluate leaders' decisions and whether the use of a part-time timetable is in the pupil's best interests. A part-time timetable must not be regarded as a long-term solution or used to manage behaviour.

If a part-time timetable is justified but the school has no clear plans to return the pupil to full-time education, you should take this into account when deciding on your grading of leadership and governance. You should also consider paragraph 34(1)(c)

of the ISS.

Check that the school has informed the local authority of any pupils on a part-time timetable who are looked after and/or who have an EHC plan.

If the school is using part-time timetables inappropriately, this may amount to a suspension of a pupil contrary to the published behaviour policy and contractual arrangements with parents (see next paragraph).

An unlawful suspension is when a school sends a pupil home or tells them not to come into school, often because of their behaviour, when this is not in line with the school's published behaviour policy and without the consent of the parents. If the school has done this, consider whether a grade of 'urgent improvement' for the attendance and behaviour evaluation area is appropriate.

## **Pupils who are not in school during the inspection**

You must gather evidence about the typical behaviour of all pupils who attend the school, including those who are not present on the day(s) of the inspection.

If you have evidence that the school has deliberately removed pupils from the site on the day of inspection or has arranged for them to be absent, and you reasonably believe that this was done because of the inspection, you are likely to grade both attendance and behaviour and leadership and governance as 'urgent improvement'. You also need to consider whether the school meets paragraphs 9 and 34(1)(c) of the ISS.

## **Remote education**

If the school uses remote education, evaluate whether it is:

- well integrated into the school's course(s) of study
- well designed as part of implementing the school's curriculum.
- recorded accurately in the attendance register
- not used as a justification for sending pupils home due to misbehaviour

If the school uses tutors to support education recovery from the pandemic, consider how this helps it to achieve the aims of the curriculum, rather than evaluating the quality of the tutoring.

## **Other matters**

### **Responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations**

On all inspections, you must ask whether anyone requires any reasonable adjustments due to a disability. Contact the duty desk for all requests. Those on the duty desk may consult with relevant policy and legal teams as needed.

What is considered reasonable is an objective test that depends on all of the circumstances of the particular case. This includes the needs of the individual concerned, how effective the change will be in avoiding the disadvantage the disabled person would otherwise experience, what impact providing the adjustment will have on the inspection, and the circumstances in respect of the

relevant inspection or visit.

To understand the request, you must enter into an open dialogue with the individual about their request. Ask what steps the individual thinks Ofsted should take to address the anticipated disadvantage. In the light of this, consider what adjustments might be reasonable in the circumstances of the inspection or visit. You can consider adjustments not proposed by the individual.

When considering whether the request is reasonable, take into account:

- how effective the reasonable adjustment would be in overcoming the disadvantage
- how practicable it is for Ofsted to make the adjustment
- the costs of making the adjustment
- the disruption that making the adjustment would cause
- the resources available to the inspector and to Ofsted
- the amount of resources already spent on making adjustments
- any health and safety risks, including the effect the arrangements will have on others

There is a 'positive' duty to make adjustments if they are considered to be reasonable, as set out here. A failure to comply with the duty to make reasonable adjustments is a form of discrimination under the [Equality Act 2010](#) and is an 'anticipatory' duty. You can treat disabled people better or 'more favourably' than non-disabled people and sometimes this may be an appropriate response to a request for reasonable adjustments.

It may also be appropriate to consider other adaptations that are requested where those with other protected characteristics may otherwise be put at a disadvantage. Where you are being asked to make such an adaptation to avoid potential discrimination,

consider the reason for the policy, criterion or practice that you are being asked to adapt (the objective justification), and what the impact would be of both making and not making the adaptation.

The [Equality Act 2010](#) protects people from unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the ground of a protected characteristic. This may include taking steps to avoid indirectly discriminating against someone on the ground of a protected characteristic. However, you should also consider the effect the proposed adaptation would have on others. Ensure that in making the adaptation, you are not directly discriminating against anyone else on the grounds of a protected characteristic.

If you agree to the request(s), agree a plan for reasonable adjustments or adaptations with the individual and leaders as appropriate. You must discuss and agree the plan with the inspection team.

You must record in the evidence base that you have asked leaders if they need to request any reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations. You must also record the outcome of any decisions. It is essential that this information is recorded factually and accurately, and the anonymity of the individual is maintained.

## **If the school has concerns/complaints**

Record any concerns raised, and actions taken, in the inspection evidence. Try to resolve any issues with leaders during the inspection. If this is not possible, the school can follow the steps set out in the [complaints procedure](#).

## **If you need to consider pausing the inspection**

There may be exceptional occasions when you need to consider pausing an inspection, including in response to concerns raised by the nominee. Contact the duty desk for advice. We will consider requests on a case-by-case basis, according to our published [guidance on pausing inspections](#).

## **If you identify evidence or allegations of abuse identified on inspection**

You must familiarise yourself with our [guidance on safeguarding concerns](#).

If you come across evidence or allegations of child abuse, stop all other activity immediately and focus on ensuring that the child receives the help they need. Do not attempt to investigate this yourself, but make sure the appropriate authority is informed, in line with the school's safeguarding policy. You must be satisfied that the correct referral has been made and record this in the evidence base.

## **If the school uses artificial intelligence**

You do not need to ask if artificial intelligence (AI) is used or actively search for it. If you come across instances where a school uses AI, or has an explicit policy on pupils using AI, record how leaders have chosen to implement it, its impact (for example, on tackling absence), how it is monitored, and the school's checks and balances to make sure it is accurate, safe

and used in the best interests of children and learners. If you have any concerns about the school's use of AI, contact the duty desk.

## If the school uses external support

If the school has received support from an external body, you must not evaluate or report on the quality of this or its impact on improvement. Instead, you must comment on the action that the school has taken and the impact those actions have had on the quality of its work.

- 
1. [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#). ↩
  2. Case records are uploaded to the pre-inspection documents for inspectors to use during preparation. ↩
  3. You (as the lead inspector) should review the ICF for completeness; if they think it needs to be amended or added to, they should discuss this with the regional Senior HMI, who can raise with the DfE. ↩
  4. A registered independent school can be approved by the Secretary of State under section 41(1) of the Children and Families Act 2014 to enable the school 'to be the subject of request for it to be named in an EHC plan'. ↩
  5. The DfE will use the information to determine whether to take [regulatory or enforcement action](#) and to prioritise those schools that require most urgent attention. ↩
  6. The [DfE's governance handbook](#), which is not mandatory for independent schools, sets out the purpose of governance, which is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. ↩
  7. Independent schools are not required to offer statutory

induction to their ECTs. However, if they choose to offer statutory induction, they must adhere to the regulations and have regard to the statutory guidance, and therefore the induction must be based on the early career framework. ↵

8. See paragraph 7 of part 3 of the ISS. ↵
9. Interpreters do not have access to the portal. ↵
10. Interpreting is a verbal explanation from one language to another. Translating involves written information. ↵
11. This includes whether leaders have made the appropriate checks on the registration status of the provision and how those checks have influenced their decision to use that provider. ↵

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